THE MOON PRINCESS

By EDITH OGDEN HARRISON

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THE MOON PRINCESS

A FAIRY TALE

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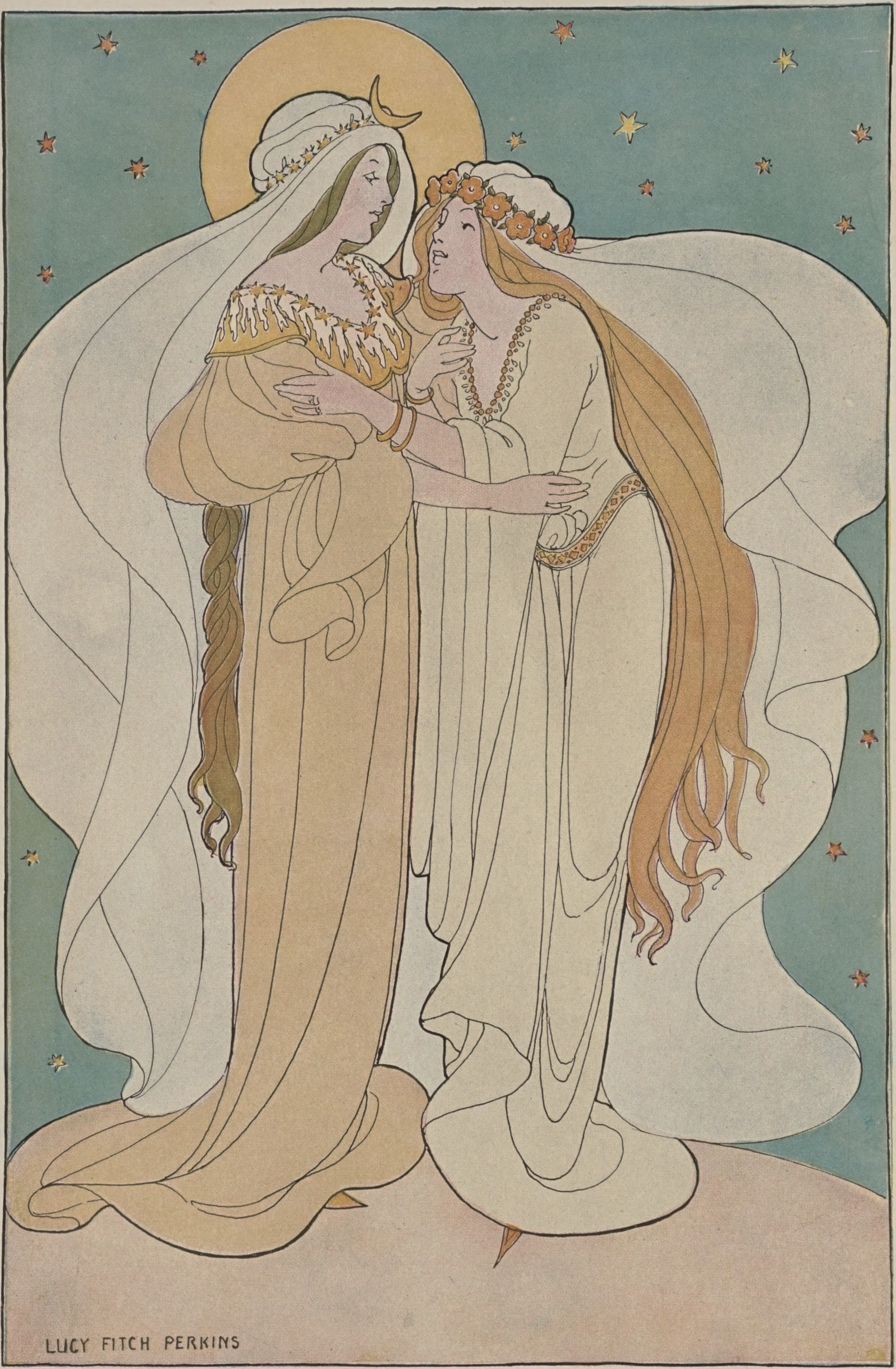
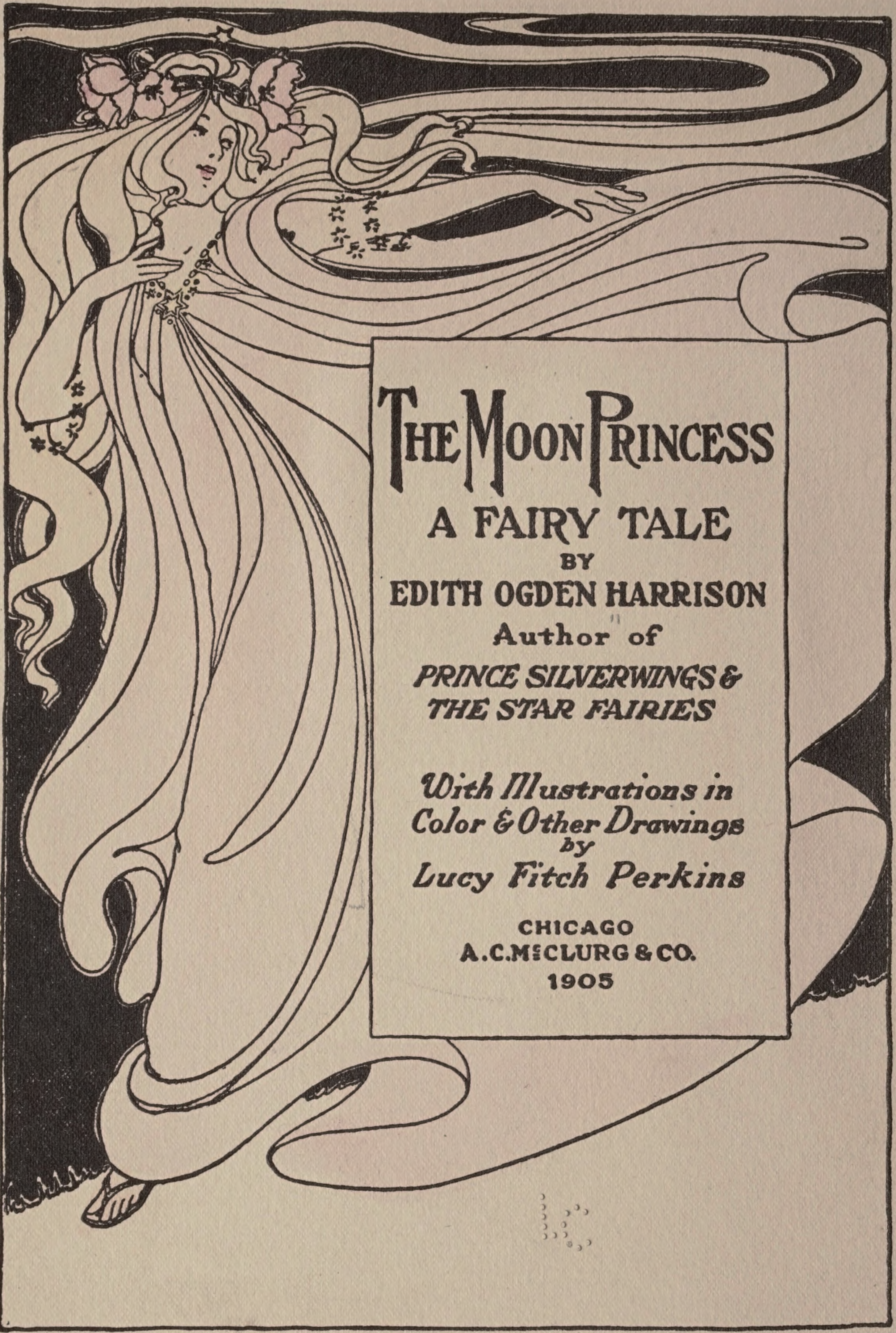

LUCY FITCH PERKINS

"*I WILL return soon, sweet mother.*" (Page 18)



THE MOON PRINCESS

A FAIRY TALE

BY
EDITH OGDEN HARRISON
Author of
PRINCE SILVERWINGS & THE STAR FAIRIES

With Illustrations in
Color & Other Drawings
by
Lucy Fitch Perkins

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1905

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TO C. H. H.

MY MOST APPRECIATIVE READER

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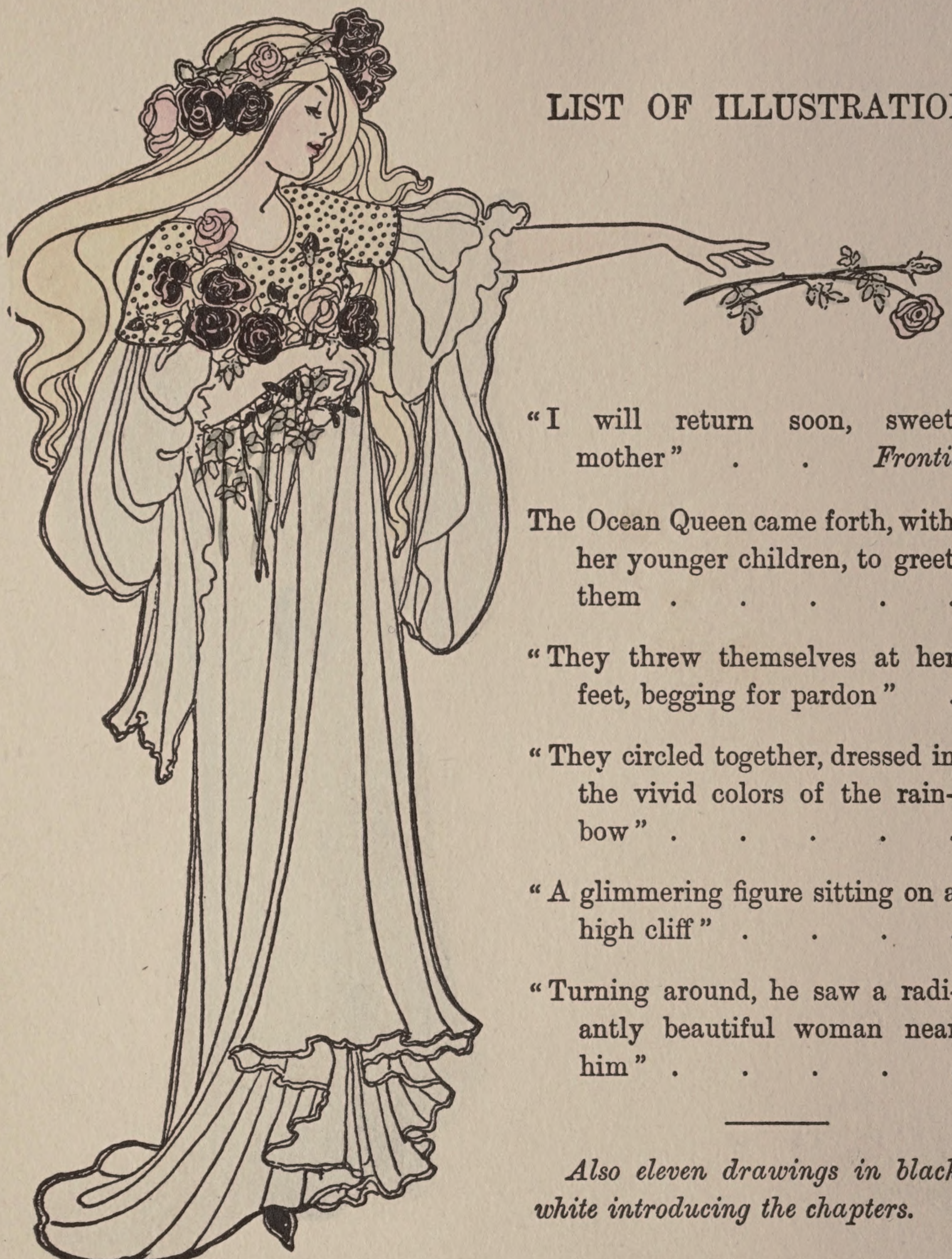

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THE MOON PRINCESS

THE MOON PRINCESS

CHAPTER I

HOW THE MOON PRINCESS CAME TO THE EARTH

THE heavens were a stainless blue, and the Moon shone out of them arrayed in silvery garments. One by one the sky's matchless jewels, the stars, peeped out, studding that great ceiling with flashing diamond-points, until the whole dome was a glittering mass of blue and silver. The Ocean below seemed a big mirror, made to catch and reflect the bewildering beauty above, for, shimmering softly, he carried in his shining depths all those myriad lights.

Calm and majestic the Moon glided over her star-studded pathway; but, in spite of her glorious beauty and brilliancy, she was really sad and sick at heart. Ethelda, her best beloved, the youngest and dearest of her children, had just made a request the granting of which caused her that night bitterest sorrow

There was an old custom among the Moon maidens that on her marriage each one of them might ask whatever she most desired, and the thing which she asked could not be denied her. Now, Ethelda of the starry eyes and the shining spun-gold hair had asked a fearful gift at her mother's hands. She was betrothed to the Sun Prince Dorion, a handsome youth, strong of limb, and a goodly sight to look upon, and he had long loved her. He had seen this dainty maiden in all her varying moods, so he knew her well. Sometimes, with her Moon maidens merrily engaged at play, she romped happy as a child; or later, with the stately tread of a young princess, she came and went in her big white palace. She often wore a pale blue gown with silver trimmings, and a crown of flashing stars upon her head, and then it was the brilliantly beautiful girl looked the daughter of the skies.

Prince Dorion had watched the slender maiden until every strand of her glittering hair was dear to his heart. Later his father's golden chariot brought him daily to her palace.

How Ethelda loved to watch him as he drove the fiery steeds with a master's hands, guiding them surely and steadily to her palace gates! He was the finest of the Sun God's sons, and Ethelda's heart beat proudly as she looked upon her chosen one. The Moon Mother was happy too, in her daughter's choice, and all would have been well in the wedding festivities save for Ethelda's unheard-of request. How the Moon hated to grant it! But she had reasoned with Ethelda long and patiently without effect. For the wilful little Princess was bent upon this mad whim. "Alas! no good can come of it," sighed the Moon heavily, and she gazed down sadly upon the Earth as she spoke. "No good can come of it," she repeated. "What could have possessed the child to want it?"

For Ethelda had asked no less than this: to visit the Earth and spend her honeymoon there!

The young Sun Prince, though at first reluctant to take his beautiful bride upon such a wild trip, had finally yielded to her persuasions, and now, being won by her tender pleadings, was as anxious to go as she.

But the Moon Mother had no such faith in the foolish journey. Her mind misgave her, and as she swung around the great circle in celestial glory, her heart grew tremulous with fear for her daughter's safety. The request must be granted: that she knew; but she was devoutly thankful for a wise law requiring a Moon maiden to revisit her own home yearly. At most, then, they could stay but a twelvemonth upon the Earth. Reason as she would, however, the Queen Mother's heart was heavy, for with the daughter upon the Earth the mother's happiness would be gone. But the maiden's joy at the consent consoled her somewhat, and with an unselfish mother's love the Queen determined to hide her own grief and make the wedding trip a brilliant and a joyous one.

Prince Dorion came with a great retinue of knights, all dressed in shining gold wrought in the Sun's fiery furnace, and bringing wonderful jewels to his bride. The Moon Queen, not to be outdone in magnificence, showered silver in plenty upon them both, and bade one hundred of her loveliest maidens accompany the bridal pair upon their journey.

The wedding was so brilliant that the skies grew bright as day, and the splendor was reflected for many miles across the heavens. When the ceremony was over, the bride, in shining white and silver garments, came forth from the circle of her bridesmaids to bid her mother farewell.

Long-limbed and graceful was this daughter of the skies. Her finely cut features showed her high-bred race. Her blond hair hung in yellow masses to her knees, while her tender blue eyes, looking smilingly upon her mother's face, were radiant with happiness. Gliding swiftly forward she reached the throne, and there, sinking on her knees, she begged her mother's blessing.

Very tenderly the Queen watched her graceful child approach and kneel, and then leaning forward she raised her to her breast and showered caresses upon her.

"Ethelda, best beloved," she began, "stay not beyond your allotted time upon the Earth. My heart misgives me when I think of your departure, and will be heavy until you return. But see, my daughter, I have provided for your safety as best I can, and you may come back to me whenever you choose." So saying, she drew the bride gently toward the window of her white palace, and there, looking down, Ethelda saw a wonderful sight indeed. A beautiful shimmering ladder of moonlight stretched in infinite splendor down to the Earth. Whichever way she looked, the majestic sweep of that brilliant ladder was before her. It reached the Ocean, whose gigantic waves of foaming white rose to meet it, and it quivered in dazzling glory upon the green-clad forests of the land.

Ethelda was amazed and delighted at the wonderful sight, and throwing her arms around her mother's neck, she poured forth her gratitude in loving words. "We will return soon, sweet mother," she whispered tenderly; "those shining steps will lead us safely back to you." Then, as her husband joined them, she stepped forward smilingly to greet him, saying she was ready.

One hundred of the Sun Prince's knights, in trappings of gold made by the Sun himself, and with bright shades of crimson trimmings, joined them as she spoke. Ethelda's maidens, in their glittering dresses of whitest silver, followed, and joining hands with the knights, began their magnificent wedding march to the Earth.

Never was there a more kingly sight. Preceding the bride and bridegroom, the gay cavalcade descended the glorious ladder of silver beams. Step by step they wandered down the moonglade toward the Earth, and the Moon, smiling lovingly at them, sighed again heavily as she spread her bright pathway of silver before them.

Now, the Earth knew of their coming, and she determined to give them a welcome befitting their high and mighty rank. She already owed a great debt to the Sun King, for it was his shining rays that warmed and nourished her and made her fruitful. Most of her splendid fertility was due to the warmth of the Sun. So she invited the whole world to meet the bridal party, giving a grand ball in their honor.

Her invitations were taken by the winds and swiftly carried to the four corners of the globe. Hundreds of noble personages were asked to meet the distinguished strangers, and all came to do them honor, bringing cordial greetings and invitations to visit the different parts of the world.

The night of the ball had come. The Earth, resplendent in jewels, awaited the arrival of her guests. The forest back of them was aglitter with lights, for all the glow-worms and fireflies had been summoned for the occasion, and for days they had been decorating the trees. An orchestra of birds sang delicious music, and overhead the sky was spangled with twinkling stars gazing in silent wonderment upon the Earth's splendor.

By the side of the Earth Queen stood Prince Dorion. His suit of pure gold shone like the Sun himself, and next to him was his beautiful bride, the Moon Princess. She was dressed in white garments embroidered in silver, and she was certainly a charming vision. Her gleaming yellow hair was caught back from her forehead with a crown of flashing stars. Her clear blue eyes, with their deep sky tints, were dancing in lights as brilliant as her star crown itself.

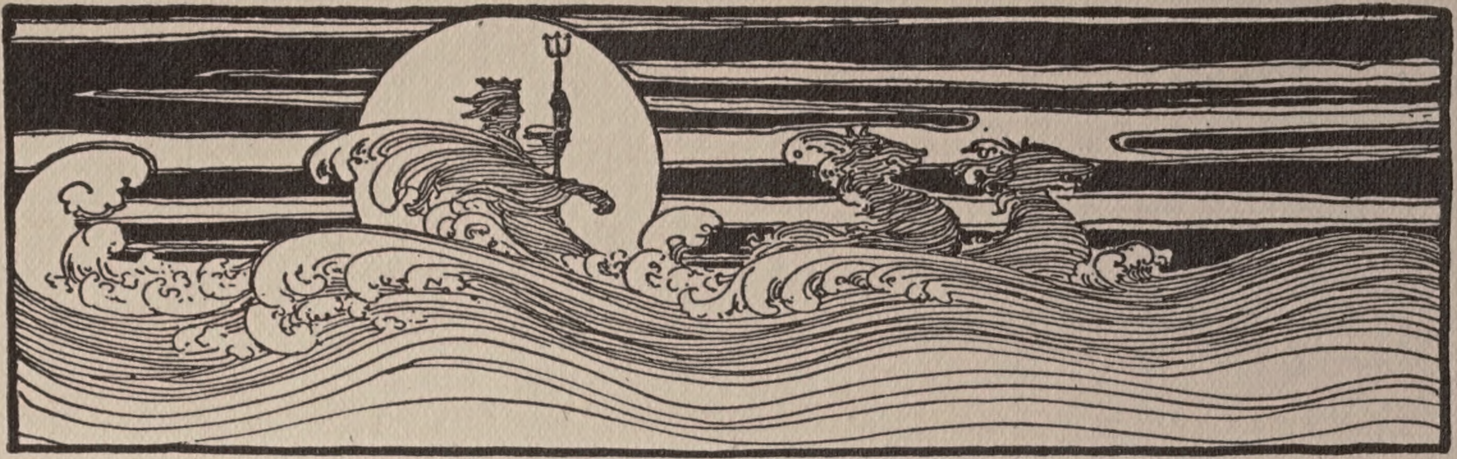
First came the Earth's eldest son, the Ocean King, to greet them. The Sea was a mass of fire with gleaming phosphorus, and King Ocean and his mermaid daughters seemed to be floating in red flames as they approached. The maidens' long and wonderfully beautiful hair floated behind them as they swam, and they sang the most entrancing songs. They bore an invitation to Prince Dorion and his bride to visit them in their marine home. And this invitation was at once accepted by the strangers. Another invitation, accepted at once, came from Prince Dorion's only sister, Princess Kuldah, who lived upon the Earth with her husband. Many more charming invitations were given them, but of course it was impossible to accept them all.

At last one distinguished-looking person strode forward, small of stature and ugly to look upon. His body was dwarfed, and he had a big hump on his back. His face was dark and glowering, and he wore a suit of yellow leaves. All the guests moved aside to let him pass, as though they feared him. He lived in the vast depths of the forest, amidst huge mountains; his daily work, with his thousands of imps, was to build those mountains big and high. Stone by stone he raised them, bleak and barren, to the clouds. He limped as he walked, and he glared angrily at the shrinking faces avoiding him; but he gave his invitation to the fair guests, as the others had done, and bowed low before them as he gave it.

An involuntary shudder ran through the lovely Princess as she heard his words, and she clung suddenly to her husband in terror, as the black dwarf's eyes dwelt admiringly upon her. She felt a cold thrill of fear at his bold glance.

But Prince Dorion, reassuring her with a tender smile, turned to the ugly creature, and to the astonishment of the Earth Queen and her court, replied: "Sir Dwarf, we accept your invitation, and will gladly ride forth with you whenever our hostess wills. The Sun King, my father, and her Majesty the Queen of the Moon, have each sent the Earth a gift as a glad token of our visit here, and we must place our precious gold and silver deep within the bosom of your great mountains. There will it best thrive and grow, increasing and benefiting the world."

The Moon Princess turned very pale when she heard her husband's reply, but the black dwarf limped away with a gratified smile upon his ugly face.



CHAPTER II

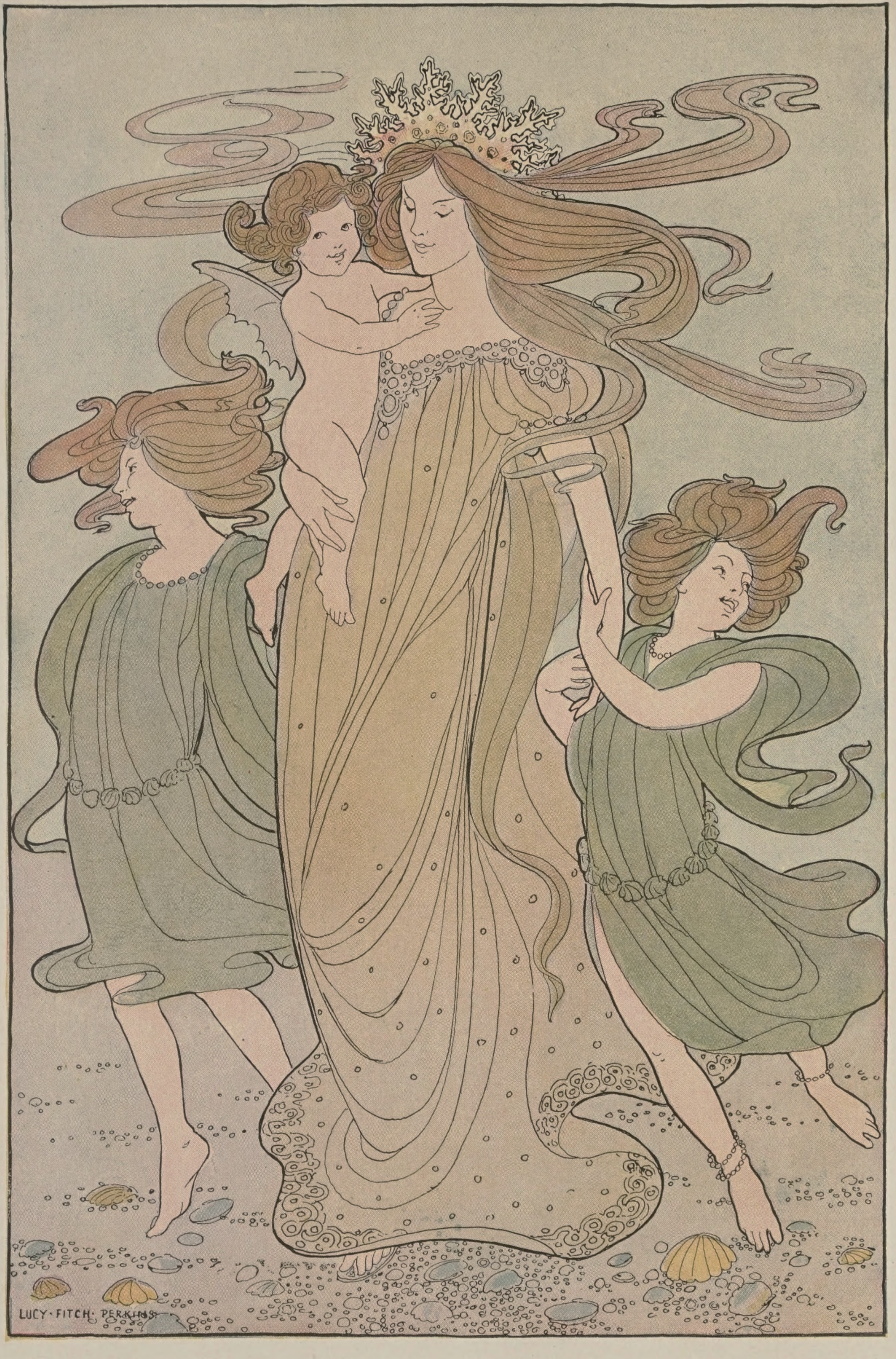
HOW THE WEDDING GUESTS VISITED THE CAVES OF OCEAN

THE Ocean King and his daughters came early for their guests. They had driven fast, and their sea-horses were covered with a lather of white foam. As they came shoreward the rising Sun dyed the sky a brilliant pink, and for a moment the water caught its color. And then it was delightful to watch the great rolling waves of the Sea blushing a delicate rosy shade. Ethelda with Prince Dorion and their friends stood on the creamy sands awaiting them. The Moon Princess wore a gown to match her blue eyes, and its exquisite train, embroidered in silver crescents, hung in heavy folds behind her.

Stepping lightly into the Ocean King's chariot, Ethelda sat beside him. Prince Dorion followed, and very soon the whole party were comfortably seated among the mermaids. Away they started. Some snowy birds, watching them off, rose suddenly, and outstretching their long white wings, floated lazily away.

Billions of sapphire waves rolled in to meet them, but the horses sped easily through, leaving only a broad roadway of foam behind. The shining sun spread now over the wide expanse, and they seemed to be flying through golden mists, while their great frothy path glittered in as many colors as the rainbow. Farther and farther they went, deeper and deeper grew the rich color of the great deep, until it seemed impossible it could become bluer. Then slowly that brilliant blue changed, becoming a clear cool green, the shade of the coldest waters. Not until then did the Ocean King draw rein, and slowly descending, they finally stopped at the gates of his palace.

The palace was a wonder to behold. Its walls were built of richest mother-of-pearl, and shaded from purest white to the most delicate rose. Its broad staircases and wide halls were all of the same costly


LUCY·FITCH·PERKINS

THE Ocean Queen came forth, with her younger children, to greet them. (Page 25) material, while its trimmings and ornamentations were pearls and diamonds of priceless worth.

To keep the white light from dazzling with its splendor, the tall green seaweeds waved about, lending a delicious, cool shade, like the green trees on the dry land, so that everything was agreeable to the eye.

The Ocean Queen came forth, with her younger children, to greet them, and Ethelda thought she had never seen anything so delicately beautiful as the Queen. Her eyes were clear as crystal pools, and her hair — a bewildering mass of gold — floated about her, covering her almost completely. She wore a pale green dress trimmed with magnificent pearls, and on her head a crown of diamonds. She glided up to the strangers, and in the softest voice bade them welcome.

A magnificent banquet was served immediately, and then they were shown the wonders of the sea palace. Rooms filled with costly treasures were opened; chests of brilliant jewels were examined.

But while the guests were enchanted with so much splendor, the King explained that to the mermaid kingdom these heaps of diamonds and emeralds and rubies were really not worth a single piece of coral; for at these huge coral beds in the bottom of the sea the baby mermaids received their education. They were taught to swim and play games and amuse themselves, and later they lent their deft fingers to build and carve those exquisite mountains of the sea. When the Moon maidens saw the coral beds, they too shared the mermaids' belief.

The party were walking through the clear smooth waters, when presently, ahead, they noticed a slight ruffle, and almost immediately they saw a long pink line. It was the coral reef. As they approached they saw great sheets of roaring foam sweep over the slippery coral, and as they passed by the hissing white wall of foam they saw that the tiny builders had raised their rose-colored mountains to a great height. The delicate work was a marvel to see; it was like the weaving of finest lace-work, and only the smartest of the mermaids were employed to carve the coral beds.

"Can the Earth exhibit greater wonders?" exclaimed Prince Dorion.

"We think not," answered the Ocean King; "but perhaps it is because we love our home so much. We have many more wonderful things we could show you, but our time is limited, and we can only briefly display our favorites.

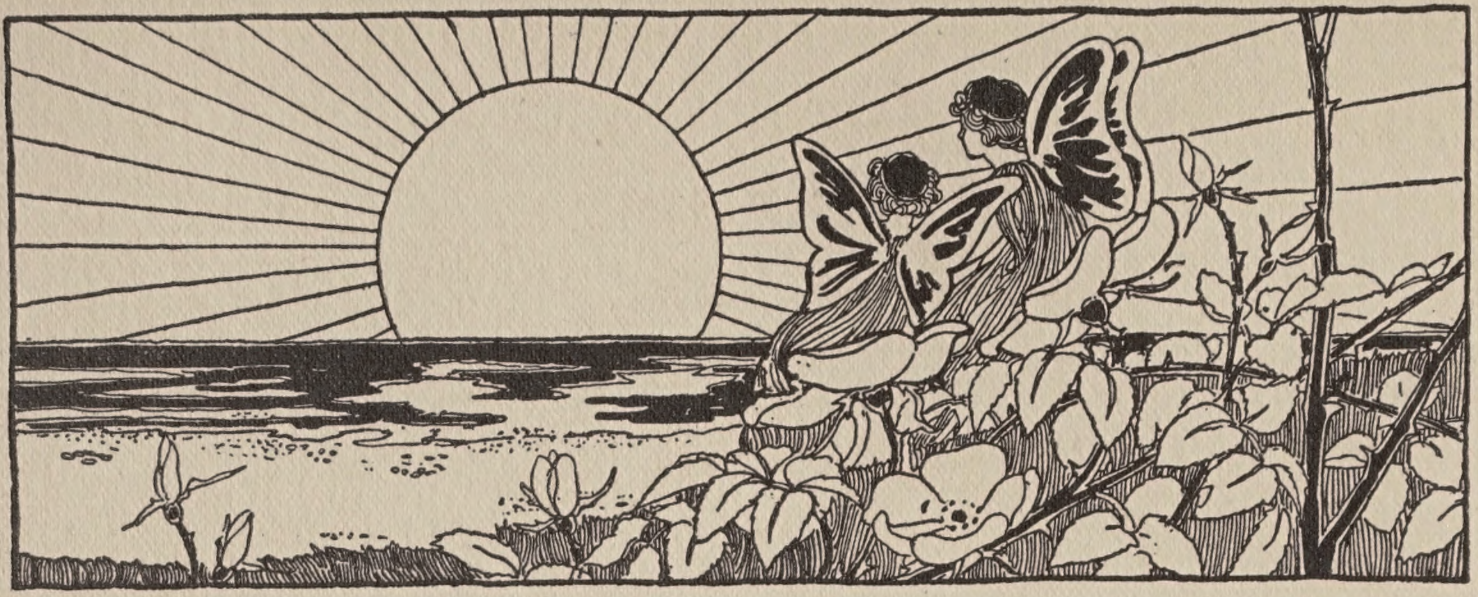
Turning, he took from the hand of one of his daughters a beautiful shell. Creamy and shining like satin was the outside of the curving piece of mother-of-pearl, but its lovely lining was as pink as a rose-leaf. Presenting it to Ethelda, the King bade her keep it to remind her of her visit to his dwelling. "This beautiful shell, fair Princess," continued the King, "shares with the mermaid kingdom its great love of home, and it carries deep in its heart the sound of the waves. It will never lose it. No matter where it goes or how long it stays, if you but hold it to your ear it will speak to you of us. For the deep musical sound of the waves will always be heard singing within its depths."

Ethelda, delighted, thanked him for the charming gift, which she gratefully accepted. Then continuing their walk, they arrived at the door of a handsome palace, where the Ocean King's only sister lived. She was called the Princess Sea Foam, and her palace was built entirely of pearls. Great oysters were constantly employed making these pearls for her, and day after day they opened their wide mouths and deposited fresh beauties at her doors. Her apartments were very elegant and all in white, and the Ocean King's guests were especially astonished at the magnificence of the Princess's clothes. She was very beautiful, for her skin was clear and white and her features delicate and pretty. She was small of stature, and looked more like a fairy than a mermaid, but her dress amazed them by its beauty. It was snow-white, and was studded with the largest and purest diamonds they had ever seen. Even her hair was covered with precious stones, and wherever she moved, sparkles of light burst forth. When she approached closer they discovered that the shining jewels were not really diamonds at all, but clear and brilliant raindrops!

The Princess Sea Foam was in reality also the Rain Princess. Her duty was to lie frequently upon the top of the waves and travel about, watching the dry land and the sky. Often one sees the broad blue waters flecked with white specks; then one knows that Sea Foam and her companions, in their white dresses, are watching the world, to determine when rain is needed. It is a great responsibility for such a tiny Princess, but she has guided her millions of followers wisely, and the Earth is well pleased with her lovely daughter's work.

They make the precious raindrops and then store them away in a big room in the pearl palace. When rain is needed the doors are opened and the skies absorb the moisture. The heavens fill with clouds,—at first glorious, shining masses, lying against the blue sky as white and foamy as the Princess herself on the blue waves, but later, gathering force, they darken to a gray or black, and fall upon the Earth in a shower of glittering drops. Over and over again must Sea Foam do this wonderful work, but it is a work of joy, because she loves those glittering drops of shining water.

The Sun warms the world and gives it heat, but the Ocean must cool and freshen it with raindrops; for all the rain that falls from the skies must first be gathered on the Earth, and this responsibility rests on the Ocean King's sister, dainty little Sea Foam.



CHAPTER III

HOW THE FAIRIES WERE CHANGED INTO MOCKING-BIRDS

THEY were most reluctant to leave the beautiful world under the water, but the Sun Prince and the Moon Princess must keep their engagements, and there were many journeyings for them yet. The Ocean King had kept them as long as possible in his dominions, but now he felt obliged to let them go, and so regretfully bade them adieu.

He had arranged in their travels about his strange and wonderful possessions to land them in a beautiful southern country. From this spot they would travel north toward the Valley of Enchantment, to visit the Sun Princess, that lovely sister of Prince Dorion who was making her home in this world. They all looked forward with much pleasure to this visit; it seemed, in fact, to be one of their chief topics of conversation, for they naturally desired to see the only sister of Prince Dorion, who was famous for her great beauty. Now and then, however, in the midst of their joyous travels, a black shadow seemed to cross the pretty Moon Princess's face: it was when she remembered the promised visit to the black dwarf. Somehow she could not overcome her horror of him, and was never reconciled to making him a visit.

Reluctantly the company bade adieu to the Ocean King and his charming family, and rose through the clear, limpid waters of a big Gulf. It was a beautiful sight that met their eyes as they came to the surface in the open sunlight. A wonderful land lay before them. Its shores were shaded with spreading branches of magnificent live-oak trees which grew down to the water's edge, planting their splendid trunks in the very midst of the curving line of yellow sand. Farther back pink crêpe-myrtles, yellow acacias, and white Spanish daggers were scattered, and a long row of pecan-trees kept dozens of chattering squirrels busy.

Cherokee roses bloomed in thousands, their yellow hearts showing in brilliant contrast to their dazzling white petals. "How beautiful this country is!" said the Princess, and every one echoed her words.

As they landed they were greeted by the Sun Princess's messenger, who would guide them northward to the Valley of Enchantment. This guide belonged to the company of Sun people who had accompanied the Sun Princess to her new home. He proved a charming companion indeed, for he knew everything about the countries through which they passed, and in their travels told them many interesting facts. They learned that they were in a southern land, on the borders of a great Gulf. They could see, beside the live-oaks, some superb trees growing to great heights,—trees with great long green leaves, holding big creamy blossoms that opened like white chalices to catch the sun. One tree especially stood out in magnificent strength. Its rough old trunk was enormous and knotted with age, and its broad branches spread out protectingly covered with big waxen leaves. The great tree had a dignity about it that fascinated the Princess. As the little company walked nearer to examine it, they noticed how the grass — soft as velvet — stretched away like a green carpet toward the yellow marsh beyond. The nearer they came to the tree the bigger the tree looked, and they found a round hollow in one side the trunk, where a squirrel had hidden his nuts. "It is a magnolia-tree," the guide replied, in answer to their questions, "and there are many thousands like it scattered through this southern country."

At that moment a sound rose upon the air, so soft and exquisite in its melody that they held their breath to listen. It came from the branches of the tree, and was a song of welcome from the mocking-birds. In a moment a thousand of these little feathered songsters had joined the chorus. Their notes rang out joyously, for they warbled and trilled in an ecstasy of delight until the strangers thought they had never heard a more beautiful concert. Then suddenly, while the Moon Princess listened entranced, the music ceased as abruptly as it had begun. They heard a flutter of soft wings, and saw above their heads a flock of tiny birds. The birds were lovely, — a soft gray in color, with a splash of white on the wings and tail, and as they flew away and disappeared in the distance all became silent again.

What a silence it was! Not a sound broke the stillness. The brilliant sunshine danced along the ground like little sparks of fire, but not a leaf stirred. It grew warm. The blue gulf lay like a sheet of glass in a sort of golden mist. The heat was intense; it seemed to shimmer in a yellow haze over everything; and then suddenly a little movement broke the profound stillness. It came from the green-eyed, red-throated lizards as they ran through the grass. They stopped to watch the strangers wonderingly, but as the Moon Princess moved slightly, the timid little creatures, affrighted, took the color of the leaf on which they were, and lay as motionless as death!

Then the Princess spoke softly: "This world is very wonderful; I have never seen so many bewildering things before."

As they resumed their journey the guide told them the history of the bird.

"The mocking-bird is really the southern fairy, you know," he began, "and the entrancing song it sings is only the story of its life. It tells the tale over and over again, in a delicious burst of song; as the little children alone understand the fairies' speech, I cannot tell all it says, but I will repeat exactly what I have heard. Once upon a time there dwelt in the midst of that great magnolia grove we have just left a band of fairies. They were the lightest-hearted and happiest little band in the world, and they had just celebrated a splendid marriage. One of their most beautiful Princesses had married a nephew of the Queen. He was as handsome as his bride was beautiful, and everything went merry as a marriage bell. Now, Prince Adelstan, in spite of his high rank and station, was always playing some prank upon some one, but his tricks were generally good-natured, and the fairies seemed to love him the better for his fun; he was, indeed, a great favorite with them all. Now, when he married the dignified and beautiful Princess Verdande, every one predicted that he would become more sober, and, as a married man, put aside his boyish manners.

"It really seemed just about as they prophesied.

Of course, a fairy's life is a brilliant round of pleasure, but Prince Adelstan seemed contented to travel the world over with his lovely wife and act just as all well-behaved fairies should. The little people were all delighted, of course, with the change in their favorite, and said among themselves he was even more attractive than ever. In reality Prince Adelstan was so absorbed in a plan he was forming for himself and bride that he had no time to think of playing foolish pranks on others. Fairies, as you know, are free to do exactly as they please, except for one rule, and that rule can never be broken. Their life must be lived at night, amid moonshine and starlight, and then they pass many gladsome hours together; from dusk until dawn they are the merriest little people in the world. But at the first streak of light every fairy must vanish,—under a leaf, in the heart of a rose, behind a dewdrop, the fairy may hide; but hide he must, and there remain sleeping until darkness again falls upon the world. This rule in Fairyland has been enforced for centuries, and no one, however brave, has had the hardihood to break it. Sometimes (but very rarely), on a day when the Sun does not shine and the Earth is covered with a white veil of mist, a fairy can peep out, but he must be extremely careful that he is only in the mist, for he must never see a ray of sunshine for a moment.

"Well, can you imagine what Prince Adelstan decided to do? He determined upon a terribly rash thing, and planned it for months. He lay awake thinking of it, for in his excitement he could not sleep. He whispered it at last to his beautiful bride, who trembled in his arms as she listened. She was horrified at first, and pleaded with him to give up his rash plan; but he was bent upon it, and after weeks of pleading from him, she finally yielded and consented to help him. Together they decided to elude the fairies and break the law; for their rash determination was no less than this—to see the Sun rise.

"Night after night they discussed it, and one beautiful moonlight one, when they had danced until dawn, and the other fairies, exhausted, had slipped into the hearts of the magnolia blossoms to sleep, Prince Adelstan and Princess Verdande stole carefully down to the waters of the Gulf, and, breathless with curiosity, awaited the coming of the Sun.

"Never shall they forget that morning. The waters of the Gulf looked steely gray in the first faint light of dawn. A pearly white mist was lifting slowly from them, and melting as it lifted. The little bride caught her breath with admiration as the cold steel-gray of the water slowly changed into a delicate, warm pink, for the Gulf, like a great mirror, was reflecting all the lights in the sky. The sea-shell pink of the faint dawn heralded the approach of the Sun. Gradually the delicate coloring grew a deeper rose, until the white clouds overhead seemed dyed in crimson. The waters lay still and silent; hardly a ripple disturbed their serenity. Presently long, piercing rays crept across the sky, while all the colors of the rainbow seemed to blend and mix together. Gradually the world grew brighter and brighter. Then suddenly out of the shining water rose a great red ball of fire! The Princess clung to her husband, for, beautiful as it was, she was surprised and frightened. The Sun mounted slowly into the sky, casting his brilliant rays across the heavens, and at the same time great slanting streaks of yellow beams danced before their bewildered eyes.

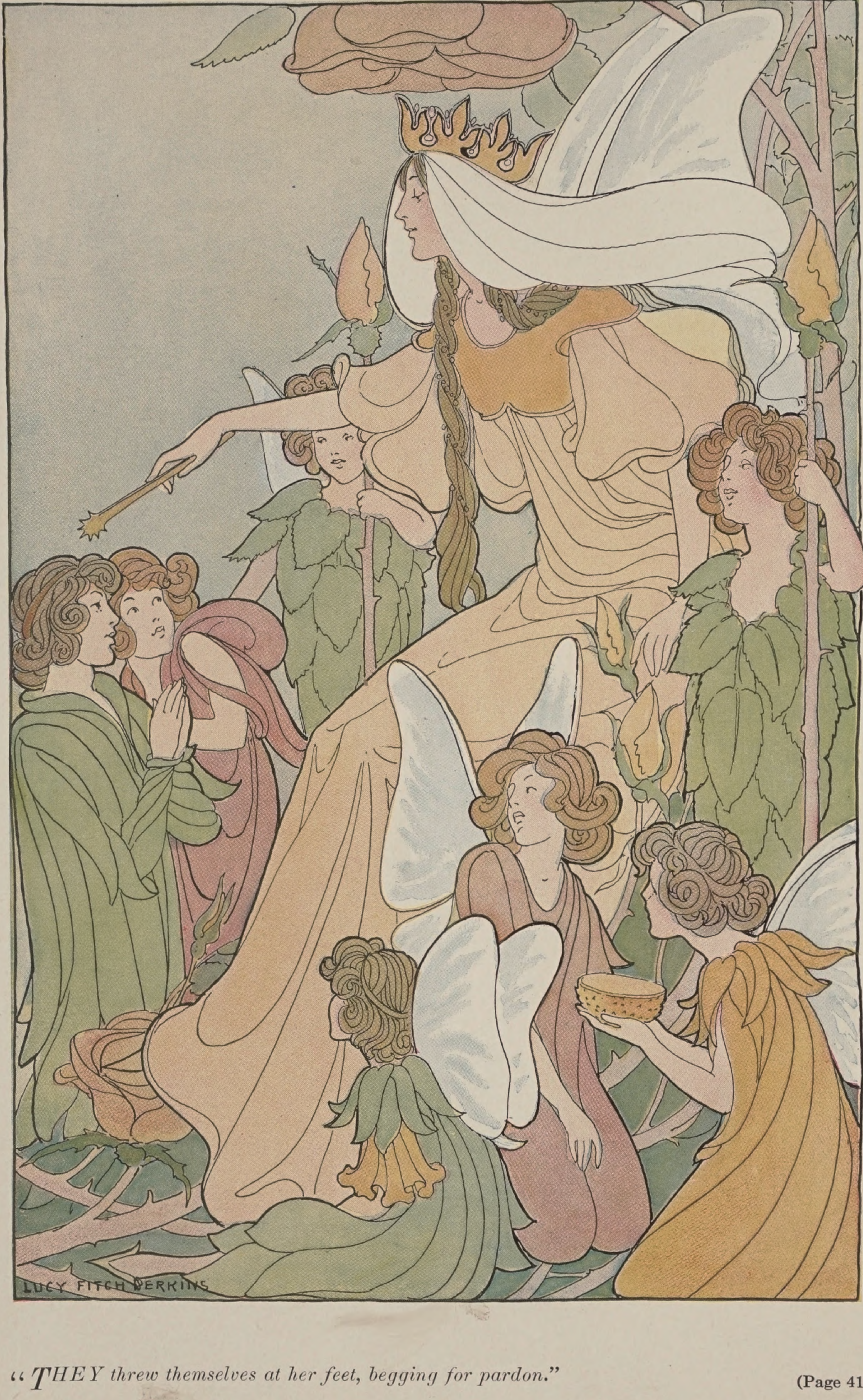
The waters of the Gulf were marvellous to see, for they glistened like millions of flashing diamonds. The two fairies stood amazed at the magnificent sight before them, for even Fairyland has nothing more beautiful than the sunrise.

"Presently a flock of white sea-gulls rose shrieking from the sands, and Prince Adelstan and his wife (startled by the sudden noise, and abashed by their terrible disobedience) tried to hide behind a blade of grass. Alas! what was their horror to discover that they could not. They had grown much larger, and they realized in despair that they could no longer hide under the flowers; their wings, too, had disappeared, and they knew they were banished from Fairyland. Then their sorrow began, for, try as they did, they could find no trace of their brother and sister fairies.

"There was a dreamy stillness everywhere, and the flowers were very tempting in the early morning dew; but alas! those flowers no longer formed a home for the disobedient fairies. Hand in hand they wandered, and for miles they stumbled sadly along, until at last they reached the edge of a great marsh. The green and yellow grasses there were scarcely moving, and lovely tints were shimmering in a hazy amber splendor. The unruffled waters of the bayou, as it ran curling around the rushes, gleamed in spots of silver. The world took on new beauties beneath the Sun, but the unhappy Princess and her husband could not enjoy them. They journeyed about in misery until they found the gnarled old magnolia-tree. They hid themselves in its hollow trunk.

"The fairies, of course, had missed them, and knew perfectly well of their misfortunes, but the Queen's heart was hardened against them because of their dreadful disobedience. However, the band of little fairies, in spite of all, united in deep sympathy for their erring brother and sister, and they prayed the Queen to grant them pardon. The Queen's heart softened a little at last, for after all the Prince was a beloved nephew; but even she had not full power to restore them to Fairyland. The law once broken, full penance must be done; for disobedience is a dreadful crime in Fairyland.

"Late one night, when the Moon was high in


LUCY FITCH PERKINS

"*THEY threw themselves at her feet, begging for pardon.*" (Page 41) the blue sky, and the world was flooded with silver, when the bright stars flashed out like millions of dancing points of fire, the two unhappy culprits crept out from the hollow of the magnolia-tree. The fairies were holding high festival, feasting on rose-leaves and drinking the dew from tiny acorn cups. Thousands of them were dancing in and out of the moonlight, and their bright wings flashed gold and silver lights wherever they moved. Their wands, too, sparkled and glittered as if they were on fire. The exiled Prince and Princess gazed sadly upon it all, seeing now fully what they had lost; but alas! it was too late. They knew quite well their bulky forms without wings could never again become as light and airy as before their disobedience. Swiftly, however, they ran forward, and before the astonished Queen had time to escape, they threw themselves at her feet, begging for pardon. The Queen frowned as she listened to the story of their disobedience, and the other fairies shuddered when they heard of the great crime. Still, her Majesty loved her nephew and his bride, and her heart was heavy as she heard the sad tale.

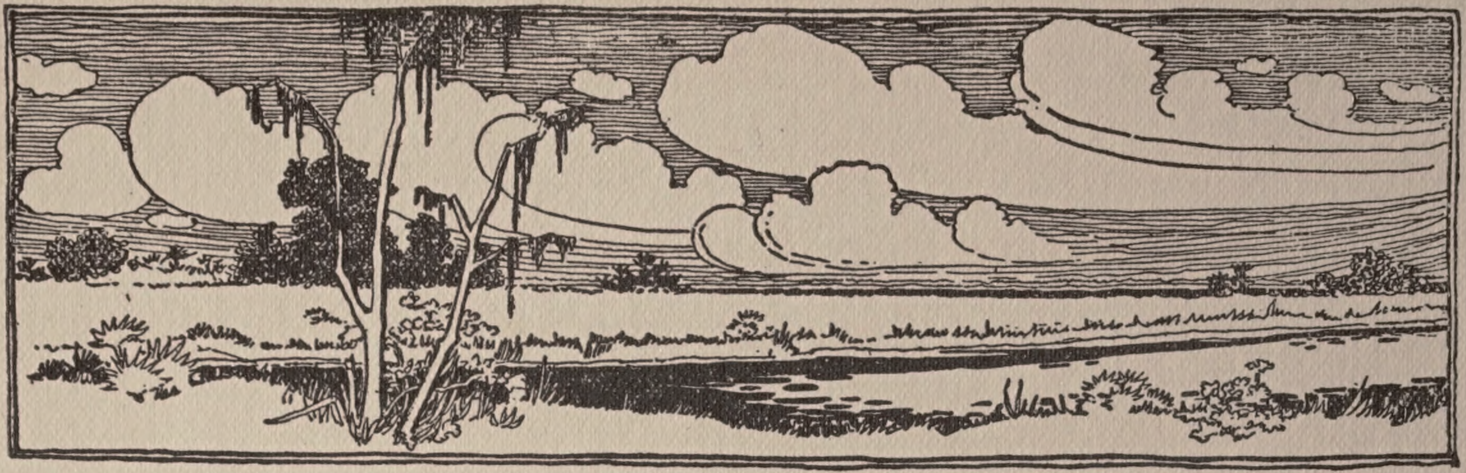
The Queen was unusually handsome that night, and seated on a throne of moss-rose buds, she seemed very far above the culprits at her feet. Her white-and-silver dress sparkled brilliantly against the bright pink of the rosebuds, and the green leaves about them were so covered with dew that they seemed to be made of frosted silver.

"'Alas! my dear children,' she began sadly, 'I have not the power to make you fairies again. You have lost Fairyland forever by your act of disobedience. Once banished, you cannot be recalled; beside, were it possible for me to admit you again to Fairyland, you would never be happy with us again. You have seen the glorious sunrise once, and nothing in Fairyland is so beautiful. You would constantly long for that magnificent sight again. But,' she added thoughtfully, 'perhaps I can render you perfectly happy in some other form upon the Earth, and in this way restore your contentment.'

"Tremblingly Prince Adelstan and his bride bade her change them, for, miserable as they were, they knew she spoke the truth. They would never be happy in Fairyland again; they would always long to see the sunrise. Then silence fell upon them all, as the Queen slowly raised her glittering wand.

"Presently there arose upon the stillness of the night a most glorious sound. It was the mocking-bird raising its voice in thanksgiving and praise for happiness found again. Again and again those delicious sounds floated out on the air, filling the night with sweetness, until the very fairies stood breathless to listen. It seemed marvellous that so much sweetness of sound could be contained in such a tiny body; but the little songsters trilled and sang in glorious delight.

"Only in this land of sunshine and magnolias will you find this wonderful bird. It never wanders far from the Gulf. It flourishes best amid the magnolias, and it fills the southern woods with music. It sings at all hours; at night, when the Moon is looking kindly down upon the Earth, and the Earth is serenely smiling to the Moon, its clear notes ring out joyously, until even the stars from their glittering palaces lean down to listen. But it is at the witching hour of dawn that the most wonderful of its melodies is heard. Then it awakens to watch again that miracle of the world, the mystery of the rising Sun, and as the golden spears of light streak the heavens, cutting away the white veil of mist and coloring the skies with rainbow hues, its glorious voice rings out and floods the world with music; for at that hour the mocking-bird is telling over and over again the story of that magnificent sight—the sunrise."



CHAPTER IV

THE LITTLE DWELLERS IN THE MARSH

AS the guide finished his charming description of the southern nightingale, he pointed out to them the marsh. It was a strange-looking place, and Ethelda asked many questions concerning it. Why was it dangerous to cross? Why must they skirt the marsh and go around it, as they were doing? It was much the shorter way to cut right across it, but instead, they walked miles out of their way to reach the other side. Their guide assured them that the marsh was not so charming as it looked. Down amid its dark cypresses, where the jagged palmetto fans and latanier grew, and where the tall rushes and reeds were so fine that, swaying softly under the breeze, they looked like moving water, but water dyed in emerald and topaz tints —lurked many dangers. Rattlesnakes and toads and deadly insects made it their home, and the ground was all a quagmire, so that stepping on it they would sink deep in mud and slime, and perhaps die there.

"Oh," said the Princess, "how awful! Does nothing nice live there? Those beautiful tiger-lilies and big purple passion-flowers bloom so charmingly, surely there must be something there to enjoy them."

"Well," answered the guide, "the birds frequently nest there, and the great pelicans and cranes hide in it; but beside them there are only three respectable families that I know of who ever enter it."

"Who are they?" asked Ethelda, deeply interested at once.

"Why, the first family I mean," replied the Sun messenger, "is the Crayfish family. Deep down in the black slime live this family, who delight in digging and burrowing in the mud. They live in very black dirt, but a happier family it would be hard to find. They are splendid little housekeepers, too, and spend most of their mornings in their own homes, trying to build up and beautify their houses, and they never meddle with any one else. Any time of day you can see their bright eyes peering out of their mud windows wonderingly. The Crayfish babies are very tiny, and are carefully and tenderly watched. They never are allowed to play with others, and cannot leave their mother's side a single minute until they are five years old. Indeed, they hold on to her sides until that age. By that time they are considered grown, and can care for themselves and choose their own friends. On this account, perhaps, the Crayfishes don't visit much, because with a dozen children clinging to her the mother is hardly a welcome guest anywhere; the Crayfishes have few friends in consequence. The Mud-Turtles, I believe, are about their only callers, and only through them do they occasionally hear of the outside world."

"How comical!" laughed a pretty Moon maiden. "Now tell us about the other families."

"The head of the other family," said the guide, "is very interesting indeed. He is a queer little animal called Opossum; he looks like a rat, but is larger than a cat. He spends the day lazily, sleeping among the foliage of trees, or in hollows of their trunks or boughs. His fur is nearly black, but little white patches about his face give him a most wise appearance. He brought his family, consisting of a wife and sixteen small babies, and started housekeeping on the edge of the swamp. The babies are not as big as mice, but they are the sweetest little furry things you ever saw. They cuddle up so nicely together, and just wait to be fed. Of course Mother 'Possum has her hands pretty full watching and caring for sixteen small children, so it devolves on the father to provide food for them; and every night he runs around the country looking for something to eat. He is really a devoted father, but he is not fond of work; and how to feed a wife and sixteen babies without work is a very hard problem to solve. So I am sorry to tell you Mr. 'Possum often steals his food, that being the easiest way to get it, and nothing appeals to him so strongly as a tender young chicken.

"Now, the third family dwelling in the marsh are the Raccoons. Mrs. 'Possum has a great contempt for this same neighbor of hers, and they are not on very friendly terms. Mrs. 'Possum is a splendid housekeeper, but Mrs. Raccoon cares nothing at all about her home. True, she builds her house carefully in the topmost branches of a tree, but having done that, she considers her duty ended, and seldom occupies it. 'Any old place is good enough to sleep in,' she says; and just so she can find a spot with water enough to moisten her food before eating it, she is content. Therefore she wanders around, with the little Raccoons, anywhere and everywhere, and when they get tired they just creep under some old log and go to sleep. Of course Mother 'Possum, with her strict ideas of housekeeping, thinks this careless habit no way to live or to bring up children; but whenever Mrs. 'Possum reproaches Mrs. Raccoon with being a slipshod housekeeper and a gadabout, Mrs. Raccoon invariably replies, 'Have you ever noticed how soft and fine my fur is, and how many beautiful rings I wear on my tail?'—for she is awfully vain. Then she flourishes her tail around, and whisking about, shows off the pretty black and white rings she carries, to the best possible advantage, until Mrs. 'Possum in disgust sends all the little 'Possums scurrying away, fearing lest they become vain and worldy like the Raccoons. But with the exception of the Raccoons and the Crayfishes, the Opossum family own the big yellow and green marsh."

CHAPTER V

THE RAINBOW SISTERS

AS the guide messenger told all these tales of the marsh, the Moon Princess and her companions noticed they were gradually leaving the southern land; for of course such wonderful beings as Moon Princesses and messengers of Sun Princesses travel much faster than mortals, and they were travelling rapidly. They seemed to be in the midst of a charming forest of long, cool shadows and crystal springs.

"What place is this?" asked Prince Dorion, stopping to admire the long, cool vista of trees ahead.

"O, this," replied the guide carelessly,—"this forest was once the abode of the Rainbow Sisters."

"Who were they?" innocently inquired a dainty Moon maiden, tripping lightly along.

"Would you like to hear about them?" asked the guide.

"O, yes," replied all the Moon maidens in chorus, "do tell us all about them."

"Once upon a time, in a charming country, a delightful people lived. The skies were clear as crystal, and the Sun shone brightly out of them. Great palm groves grew green and beautiful, and curious flowers sprang up in marvellous bits of color. There was a strange and fascinating beauty about this land. Even the rocky hills edging the big broad desert that stretched for miles away, barren of the smallest green blade of grass to make them pretty, were not ugly. Yellow as gold they sparkled in the bright sunshine, rich and mellow against the paler sand beyond. The country lay near a large blue sea, and through its many cities ran a splendid shining river. Now, every one of the clear, cool drops of this smiling stream was precious as diamonds to the people, for, beautiful as their land was (and it was superb with its splendid mosques and temples and rich with jewels and carvings), it lacked one thing that the rest of the world enjoyed, — never a drop of rain fell there.

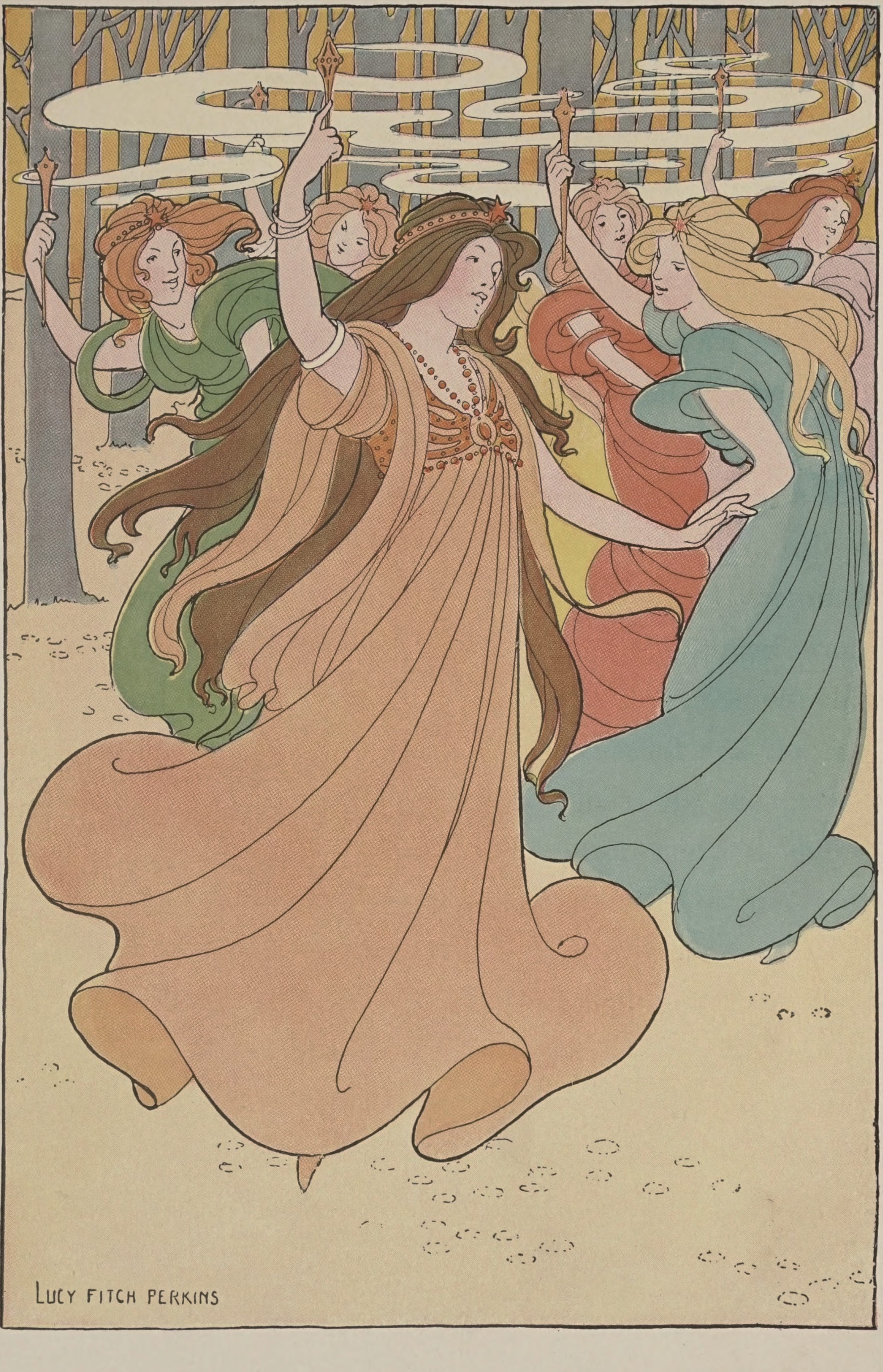
"For more years than you could count, the trees and the flowers had never tasted a cool sweet drink from the skies. The heavens were always blue and clear, for the Sun shone brilliantly out of them every day. Sometimes a cloud might form, but if it did, it floated by white as the foam on the sea, never dark or black.

"Now, you may think that golden sunshine and blue skies are very lovely things to possess, but the people tired of having them all the time. They felt that a nice shower of rain occasionally, even if it came out of an ugly black cloud, would be better than all the pink and violet and green shades of their clear heavens. The only thing that saved their trees and their gardens from burning up as in the dry heat of the desert, and that gave them water, was the glorious big river flowing by. No wonder, then, they loved and prized its drops. Broad and long, it ran through the country, and curled in silver splashes about the banks. Twice every year it overflowed, and then, with feasting and joy, they caught it in pools and canals dug to hold and preserve the precious liquid. In this way they kept the gardens green and lovely, but oh, the work was so hard! Thousand of poor slaves labored day and night to accomplish it. The kind-hearted king offered a big reward to any one who would devise some way to make rain fall in his country, and many wise men spent days and nights studying over the great question. Big trees were planted to catch and draw the moisture, and many other means were tried, but in spite of all these doings the clouds sailed by, as fleecy and white as snow.

"So things went on for many years, and still no rain ever came. Now, the king had an only son, to whom he was perfectly devoted. The child was very beautiful, and was also wise, as a prince should be. It was a common thing to see the handsome little fellow standing in the midst of a grave council of men, listening to their words of wisdom. He never seemed to tire of their long discussions, and would remain, solemn and silent, among them, instead of playing with the children about him. Thus he grew in wisdom and strength to manhood, but he was seldom seen at the court balls and festivals, preferring to wander about among the beautiful mosques of his father's city, or to stand on one of their daintily carved minarets and gaze across the yellow sands of the desert. Often he would remain thus for hours, and though his eyes were looking far out over the appalling yet wonderful beauty of the desert, his thoughts were always only of how he might solve the riddle of his country, and bring it the cool drops of rain it so earnestly wanted. This one idea absorbed him utterly, he could think literally of nothing else, for he noticed with sorrow how terribly hard his father's slaves toiled to carry the precious water from the river when they tilled the ground.

"One day, shortly after he was grown, he was sitting beneath the shadow of a great pyramid, and was planning and musing on the one question always uppermost in his mind. The day was warm; the desert around him shimmered in a golden haze. The yellow hills were so bright beneath the noonday sun that his eyes fairly ached as he watched them, and it was a relief to turn from their glittering lights toward the cool, flowing river, and watch a fringe of feathery, waving palms. 'Oh, for the dark shadow of a cloud,' he murmured, 'to soften all this glare!'

"He had not spoken aloud, and yet he heard a musical sound as though in answer to his wish. He turned quickly, and saw a wonderful sight. The desert had disappeared, and he was looking into a shadowy green forest, with crystal springs. Clear, limpid streams of water ran through the woods, and beautiful flowers were blooming. Farther along in the distance he saw a big mountain, dark and gray, and yet all about its sides grew pretty green ferns. Looking closely, he observed that there was an opening in its side, and through this opening came the music of a flute. As he watched more closely he saw a lovely maiden come slowly forth. She was dressed in a brilliant gown of orange color, and her flowing robes floated softly about her. Her hair hung in waves of gold, and on her forehead flashed a beautiful star. In her hand she carried a wand, but the wand was so curious that he forgot the beauty of the


LUCY FITCH PERKINS

"*THEY circled together, dressed in the vivid colors of the rainbow.*" (Page 57) maiden in noticing it. It was long and slender, and seemed to be made of pure gold and laden with jewels; but it was not this wealth of glistening gold that attracted him, it was a curious cloud of white mist that curled and floated away from it each time that she waved it aloft. He had never seen anything so peculiar before. Each white cloud that floated away nestled among the hollow places in the hills like a thin veil, or hovered over the babbling streams in the forest. While he was watching the mysterious cloudlets from the magical wand, a second maiden, more beautiful than the first, followed, dressed in a pale blue gown, and having, like the first, a brilliant star on her forehead. She also carried a jewel-laden wand, and it sent forth similar mysterious white clouds. Then came a third, dressed in a brilliant red; and another, in soft green; and still another, in charming violet; and so on, until seven beautiful creatures stood together, dressed in the seven vivid colors of the rainbow. They formed a ring, and slowly moved together in a circle about an open space before the mountain. Lightly stepping, thus they danced, always in a circle, and always gazing intently toward the opening in the mountain through which they had come.

"Presently, as they gazed expectantly, Prince Asgard saw coming toward them the most exquisite creature he had ever beheld. She was tall and slender, and her graceful form seemed to dance along rather than walk. She was dressed in some soft, clinging material of pure white, shading to a glittering silver, and the girdle confining her waist looked like a bit of the blue sky itself, it was so dainty. Her hair was like that of the other maidens, and looked like spun gold, and it was so fine that it glistened wonderfully as she moved. Her slippers were pale blue, and embroidered with silver threads. A brilliant star on each slipper flashed like a big diamond as she danced along. A tiny golden crown held her hair in place, and seven glittering stars encircled her head. Her wand was of frosted silver, and as she waved it, the soft vapor rolled away in white clouds, as it did before the wands of the other maidens. As she appeared, the seven other maidens broke into a song of gladness, singing in a clear, high tone these words:—

Little Sister, fair and dear,
Born of seven colors clear,
Welcome! In our round of pleasure
You 're to us the dearest treasure;
Out into the world we 'll send
Mist and clouds of white that blend.

The silver maid replied, singing:—

Dearest sisters of my race,
I come forth to your embrace;
Faithful, tender, always true,
Shall my love be unto you.

Then they all danced a wonderful dance while singing together:—

Let the foaming clouds on high
Fall in raindrops from the sky;
Let the lightning's fire flash,
Come, with thunder's awful crash!
Let the cooling rains thus sink,
Giving earth her crystal drink!

"As they moved together in graceful steps and in perfect rhythm to the music of the song, Prince Asgard saw a wonderful arch or bow form across the cloudlets that had arisen from their wands. It was a magnificent rainbow, and each of the seven distinct colors was matched in shade by a dress worn by one of the maidens. Their flowing draperies blended bewitchingly and mixed together in pretty confusion as they danced, making thus a complete circle of rainbow colors. It was an exquisite sight, and the Prince marvelled at it, and wondered what it all meant. Presently the maiden who had first appeared, and who seemed to be the eldest and the leader of the sisters, waved her wand aloft and approached the silver maid, and taking her hand, led her into the middle of the circle. The circle then formed again, and continued dancing around the little white Princess. For several minutes they danced; then each in turn, beginning with the eldest, tenderly clasped the silver maiden in her arms and kissed her on the brow, and then ran lightly into the opening in the side of the mountain.

"The silver maid stood one moment longer, smiling and lovingly watching her sisters, then she, too, tripped lightly toward the mountain, as though to follow them. But, as if a sudden thought had come to her, she turned abruptly and glided toward Prince

Asgard. His heart was beating with excitement as he watched her, and he held his breath with admiration, for he had never seen any one before so wondrously beautiful.

“In a moment she was beside him, and he noticed her eyes were sparkling and blue as the girdle she wore.

“‘O, Prince of the Southern Lands,’ she began, in musical tones, ‘you have witnessed the dance of the Rainbow Sisters — a sight forbidden to mortals. We live in an enchanted mountain in the heart of a great forest. Our mother is the beautiful Sea Foam, whom you have often watched in her white dress upon the ocean. We help our mother with her work, but our home is in the deep recesses of these lovely woods. Never before has a mortal eye seen these woods nor witnessed our sacred dance in them. From our magical wands float out the mists to form the cloud-world. Upward they travel, gathering moisture as they go, and floating across the blue heavens, they fall again in refreshing rain upon the earth. But our precious mist-clouds never fall in your country. We will never send them there again unless, unless—' and she hesitated in the most charming and provoking manner in the world.

"'Unless what, O beautiful Princess of the Silver Gown?' eagerly asked the Prince.

"'Alas, that I may not tell you,' replied the little Princess, growing grave. 'This only may I add: Once, in the long ago, your people did a great wrong, and were very rude to my sisters. It was their custom then to dance publicly, once a year. Always your people gathered to watch them, and with pleasure my sisters danced before them, and with their magical wands they sent out the mist-clouds far and wide. Refreshing rain fell in your midst then as elsewhere, and everything was joyous and charming. But your people were rude and offended my sisters sorely, and never again will they visit you or dance before mortals. All your methods to bring rain into your country will fail, your schemes will come to naught, and until my sisters relent and forgive, the clouds will continue to sail across your blue skies as white as the flecks of foam on the sea.'

"'Never shall the rain fall in my country?' echoed the young man sadly. 'Never? Then, O beautiful Princess,' he added despondently, 'shall I never see you again?' For at that moment the Prince forgot his great problem, how to bring rain to his country, and thought only (with a heavy heart) that he would lose sight of the little Princess of the Silver Dress.

"'Never, O Prince,' replied the Princess gravely, 'unless—' then she smiled suddenly, showing her teeth like gleaming pearls between her red lips,—'never unless you find us again, and—'

"'And what?' the Prince demanded earnestly.

"'Alas,' replied the silver maid, again grave, 'I cannot tell you. There is one thing alone that might cause them to return to your country, but it seems so impossible, that it will never happen, I am sure; and beside, I cannot tell you what it is.'

"'O,' replied the Prince earnestly, 'I will find it out. No obstacle on earth will prove too hard, and you may be sure nothing will prevent my finding you, beautiful Princess.'

"'I wish you success,' sweetly replied the Silver Princess, and then, as she spoke these words, she blushed a vivid crimson.

"She was so beautiful as she stood thus before him, blushing and smiling at the same time, that the Prince, falling on his knees, begged her to give him a sign by which he might hope to see her again and win her love.

"She tore off a piece of her blue girdle, and dropping it on the earth, put her foot lightly upon it. 'I leave you a flower,' she said, 'may it comfort you. Forget me not'; and saying this, she disappeared.

"The Prince rubbed his eyes, for as she vanished he found himself again gazing at the feathery green palms across the big river, and looking around, found the yellow desert stretching in boundless sands to meet the horizon. The forest, the mountain, all had gone. But as he turned away from the great tawny hills in despair, he saw at his feet a tiny bit of blue. Stooping, he picked up the prettiest flower he had ever seen. It was as blue as the silver maid's eyes, and as he held it to his lips he repeated her words, 'Forget me not'; and since that day the little flower has always been called the forget-me-not.

"Now, as Prince Asgard went home he pondered deeply on what he had seen, and gaining the consent of his father and the wise men of the country, he gathered together a great army and started out into the world in quest of the unknown princesses. No person believed he would succeed in finding the Rainbow Sisters or in bringing rain into the country. The story of the Rainbow Maidens was well known to the wise men, but they counted it a myth, a fairy tale, and they smiled among themselves when they heard that Prince Asgard believed it firmly. But they did not object to his trying: it would do no harm; and in the meanwhile they would still study and devise other methods.

"Prince Asgard said good-bye to his father and the people, and at the head of a great army sparkling in gold and silver helmets and shields, he started on his journey. He was going to look for the Rainbow Sisters because his country needed rain, yet in his heart he knew it was because of love for the youngest and prettiest of those sisters that he was so eagerly searching.

"The army travelled everywhere throughout the world. By sea and by land they went, and they had many wonderful adventures. Tigers and wolves, bears and panthers, attacked them, and strange people told them they were on a foolish quest, but they did not heed such remarks, and continued on their way. But after several years had passed, and they seemed no nearer the Rainbow Mountain, the soldiers became discontented, and said it was a foolish trip after all, and begged to be allowed to return to their own homes. The strange countries through which they passed taught them much, and they often saw rain and splendid storms; yet when some of their fine ships were wrecked and lost at sea, many of them felt that perhaps it was pleasanter after all to be in a country where only sand-storms of the desert were known. One by one the soldiers were released by Prince Asgard from their promises; they returned to their homes, and at last the Prince was entirely alone. But he was not discouraged. Determined and brave, he vowed he would never give up the search, and he started out again with renewed courage to find the beautiful Princess of the Silver Dress.

"He wandered many months, but without success.

At last one night he stood, almost despairing, on the edge of a dark forest. He had just made up his mind that he would live and die in a foreign country, because he would never go back to his own home until he found the Silver Princess. ‘O beautiful Princess,’ he said aloud, ‘some way I shall find you and prevail upon you to marry me, for I can never be happy without you’; and yet as he said it, it seemed to him almost an impossibility.

“He entered the forest and sat down within its gloomy depths to rest a while. The Moon was just rising, and in a little while her bright rays penetrated the black density of the trees. Little patches of silver lay along the ground, and a light wind stirring the trees made the silver rays dance along, until the earth seemed sprinkled with millions of shining jewels. He was watching the pretty sight intently, for it made him think of the dress of silver that the little Princess wore. He was so absorbed that he was considerably startled when he heard a musical sound such as he had heard on the edge of the desert.

“Looking up quickly, he beheld, to his amazement and joy, the same big mountain, and heard the rippling waters of the crystal streams flowing over the rocks. He could hardly breathe, he was so excited, and so fearful lest it should prove a dream.

"But again the beautiful sister emerged as before. Her magical wand sent forth its cloud-vapors as she danced forward; again the other lovely maidens followed, and again they formed a ring of rainbow brilliancy. The Prince sat expectant and trembling. Would the Silver Princess appear? A moment more and the little Princess tripped out, more beautiful than ever. Her silver dress gleamed and sparkled in shining light as she floated forward. Her eyes were tender and blue, and her dainty girdle, with its touch of color, bound her slender waist. Her lovely arms shone white and firm through the thin gauze of her dress. Butterflies floated about her, airy, exquisite things, marvellous in color, and lighting on her hair and shoulders, gave a curiously beautiful touch to the picture.

"Her sisters greeted her lovingly and tenderly, as before, and they then began their graceful and mysterious dance. Clouds of vapor rolled about them as they moved, until the forest was enveloped in a misty veil; but through it all the dazzling dresses and graceful forms could be plainly seen. Then, as the dancing drew to a close, the rainbow circle shining lovely through the mist, the seven dancers, each in turn, stooped, and clasping the Silver Princess in their arms, kissed her caressingly.

"Prince Asgard remembered with an aching heart that this parting kiss was a signal for their disappearance, and fearing he might lose the beauteous maid again, he darted forward impulsively. He hardly knew what he intended to do; he had formed no idea beyond the fact that he would speak to her, appeal to her to remain by his side. At the moment he sprang forward there was a fearful cry from the seven sisters, and turning, they fled to the mountain side, urging the Silver Princess to follow. She stood dismayed, and trembling in every limb, and then, with a little low cry of terror, she followed swiftly. But whether she was confused or frightened, she stumbled as she ran, and fell upon the earth.

"At that moment Prince Asgard reached her side and lifted her gently to her feet. She turned so pale as he assisted her that he held her for a moment in his arms to support her, fearing she would faint, and anxiously asked if she were ill.

"'Alas, no,' she replied, as she drew away from him, 'but you have done a very terrible thing.'

"At that moment a sad and mournful cry arose from the heart of the mountain, and the seven sisters floated out slowly and surrounded the Silver Princess. She threw herself on her knees before them, but they did not touch her. It seemed as though they feared to do so. She implored them to touch her with their hands, to kiss her, but they only sang a sad refrain in answer to her prayers.

Little sister, mortal now,
Alas, we cannot kiss your brow.
Still for ever shall abide
In your sky a rainbow guide;
And the love we have for you
Now and always shall be true.

Then, tenderly kissing their hands to her, they floated off and disappeared in the mist.

"'What does it mean?' said Asgard tenderly, lifting the Silver Princess from her knees. 'Why are you so unhappy? I love you with all my heart, little Princess. Will you not consent to marry me? Ask your sisters to spare you, for I cannot live without you.'

"'Alas,' she replied, 'my sisters have gone for ever from my sight. When you first touched me I became a mortal like you, and I cannot now return to them.'

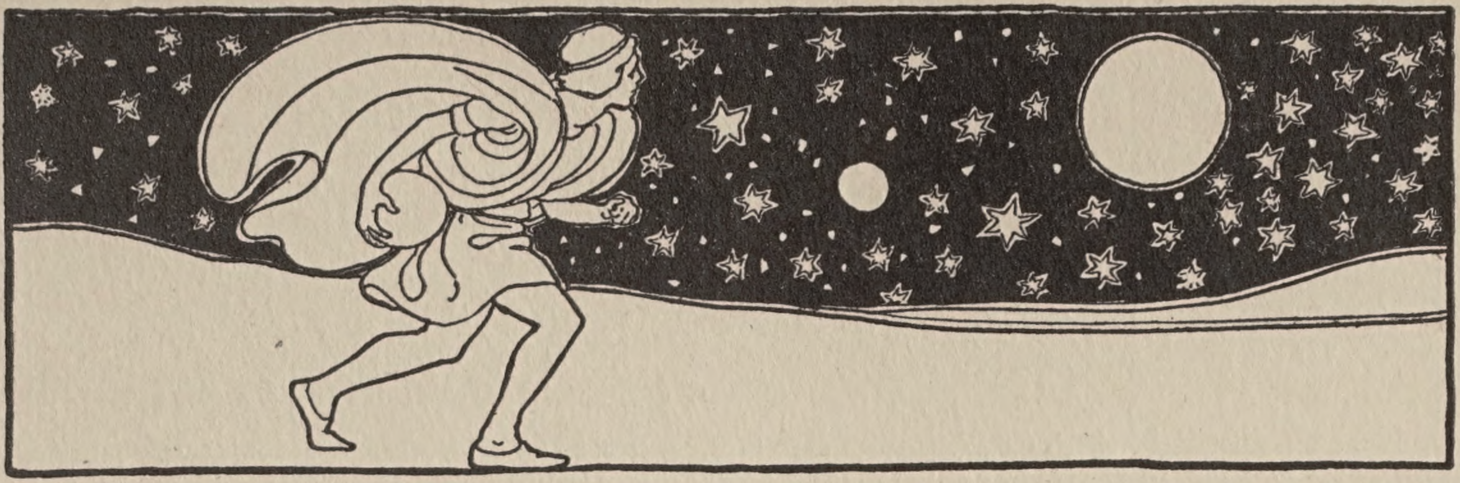
"'O, little Princess, do not be sad,' replied the Prince, 'for you have made me so happy by remaining. Surely you will not refuse now to marry me?'

"'No,' replied the Silver Princess, smiling through her tears. 'I am an earth maiden now, and I love you. But though I am happy to be with you, I am sorry to lose them. Our dear mother warned them that some day I would love a mortal, and they have feared you since the night I spoke to you in the desert. That was the condition I could not tell you,' she added shyly. 'Your touch would make me mortal, and as you lifted me in your arms when I fell, I became an earth maiden and lost my fairy nature. But you have solved the riddle of your country, for when we enter it together, you will find that rain will follow. My sisters love me dearly, and for my sake will forgive your people. They will follow me to my new home, and though we shall never see them again, the reflection from their brilliant dresses will glow in the sky. As the rainbow, they will arch the heavens when we arrive, to show me they are near to welcome us.' And sure enough, when Prince Asgard and the beautiful maiden of the silver dress (who was called Hyndla) entered the land of lotus flowers and acacias, they saw, arching the heavens, a magnificent rainbow.

"The people greeted them with cries of joy, and gave them a magnificent wedding, for they were grateful to Princess Hyndla and her seven sisters, and they had learned all about her in messages from Prince Asgard. On the day he and the Princess Hyndla appeared, a great white cloud hovering over the city suddenly turned black, and fell in millions of sparkling drops upon their fields, and the splendid rainbow soon afterward arched the skies.

"The Princess Hyndla grew more beautiful each day, and as she was wise as she was charming, you may be sure her husband loved her dearly. Together they planted row after row of handsome trees to remind them of Hyndla's forest home; those green trees brought cool shadows, and when the clouds floated low to kiss them, the broad branches caught and held the moisture. Ever after, rain frequently fell in the land.

"Years later, when the children of Hyndla and Asgard were old enough, they played in the palace gardens, and romped merrily beneath those same shade trees, and sometimes they whispered lovingly to each other the romantic story of their beautiful mother and her rainbow sisters."



CHAPTER VI

HOW THE SUN PRINCESS CAME TO THE EARTH

OH, how charming the Rainbow Sisters must be!" said Ethelda, "and how I love to hear you tell these wonderful stories of the Earth! Do you know any more?"

"Yes," replied the guide, smiling, "a good many more, but what would you like to hear about?"

"Won't you tell us of how the Sun Princess happened to come to this world?" interrupted a dainty little Moon maiden; "I really have never heard it exactly, and as we are going to visit her, perhaps Princess Ethelda will let us all hear about it?"

"Most willingly," replied Ethelda; "I know the wonderful story almost by heart, of course, but I never tire of it," she added, looking tenderly at Prince Dorion the while.

So the guide, with this permission, began:—

"In the Land of the Sun there was once a Palace of Wisdom, where all the science in the universe could be studied. Of course this Palace of Wisdom became very famous. Far and wide it was heard of, so that from all parts came representative young men to study and become wise. Now, the ruler of the Sun lands was a powerful king, possessing many sons, but only one daughter, the Princess Kuldah. She was a maiden of wonderful beauty. Her countenance was so exquisitely lovely, that all who looked upon her immediately fell in love with her. This caused the young Princess, as well as her father, great annoyance, because her suitors became legion. One day, however, with the help of her maidens she wove a veil of delicate texture, which completely concealed her features. In this way, she was enabled to go and come throughout her father's vast possessions in comparative ease.

"Notwithstanding her great indifference toward her lovers, kings and princes sought her hand in marriage, but her father (who adored her and could deny her nothing) was secretly well content that she chose none of them, but remained always in his dominions with him.

"Tall and of majestic appearance, the Princess Kuldah looked the daughter of the Sun King. Her eyes were brown and large, with brilliant lights within, and her curling brown hair, falling below her waist, had caught a little of the golden fire of the Sun. Her gleaming white teeth looked like pretty little pearls when she smiled. Indeed, she was a queenly sight as she drove in her handsome chariot toward the Fire Mountains.

"These mountains were a great range of gorgeous-hued stones, piled very high. Rising in blazing splendor, they perpetually sent forth their red beams in dazzling streams of light across the Sun country. But the heat and glare of her home—which would have burned and killed an earth maiden—were but life-giving elements to the Sun Princess. She loved the glitter of her country, and no glare seemed too great for her. The palace where she dwelt was built of the brightest, yellowest gold to be found, and she moved through it a splendid vision of beauty.

"Her favorite ride was toward the Fire Mountains. One morning as she drove the fiery steeds toward their flaming heights her horses became unmanageable. Pull as she would, she could not control them; they went like the wind at his greatest fury. She had outrun all her companions in her mad race, and she was in the most imminent danger of being killed. At this critical moment there arose in her path a tall and handsome young man. The horses were as startled as the young Princess at this sudden appearance, and for a moment, in alarm, slackened their speed. It was in this second of hesitation that the young man leaped into the chariot beside Kuldah, and snatched the reins from her hands. It took but a few moments of his great strength to subdue the enraged animals completely, and in a little while they were trotting along quietly, as if nothing had happened.

"Then of course the grateful Princess turned to thank her preserver. In her excitement (when she had lost control of the horses), she had thrown back her veil, and the young man found himself steadily gazing into her beautiful countenance. Strive as he would, he could not resist the love that surged in his heart as he looked upon her. But although he was falling in love rapidly, he had heard too much of the haughty Princess's coldness and indifference to feel sure of winning her. He guessed at once it was she, because he had heard she was the loveliest being in the Sun world, but he determined he would not yield to her influence and become one of her suitors. The Princess's own feelings, when she looked at the young man, surprised her very much. He was so modest and dignified, and withal so handsome and charming, that she could not help wondering who he was. He was certainly not one of her suitors, for she had never seen him before. This young man, too, seemed quite indifferent to her attractions, and talked to her very seriously about driving her horses, and showed her how to manage the reins in case they tried to run away again. She might have been just a plain girl for all the admiration he showed. At first this indifference pleased her; later she rebelled a little against it.

"She learned he was a young Prince who had been studying in the Palace of Wisdom. This astonished her still more, for although he had been in her country some time he had never sought her out at all. He had come to the land of the Sun to study its fire and flame, and he was evidently absorbed only in that study. The Princess was so astonished to learn all these facts, and to observe his indifference to her famous beauty (which was proved by his not seeking her hand in marriage), that she forgot to lower her veil, and sat talking to him much longer than she otherwise would have done. Finally remembering, she covered her face, but not before she had asked him to call at the palace and let her father thank him properly for having saved her life.

"The young man secretly determined he would not accept her invitation, for he had already learned to love her, and feared the usual fate of her suitors. However, when the hour approached the next day he could not resist the temptation to see once more the lovely Princess; after that he found many excuses to call, and managed each day to see her.

"But the wonderful part of it all was, that Kuldah took as much pleasure in his company as he did in hers. So later, when he asked her to marry him she said yes, right on the spot, fearing to delay, lest he might go off and become as indifferent as he was at first, and never come back again.

"He was very happy when she said yes, and thus far everything had gone very smoothly for them both; but when they went in to see the old King their troubles began. Kuldah was wreathed in smiles, and Prince Minio looked very happy and proud. The old King, who had never supposed for one minute that his daughter would accept any man,—having refused so many,—had one day rashly promised all the suitors that, if she ever made a choice, they should each have a fair chance to win her. This, of course, was the cause of the lovers' trouble now. The Princess was indignant that her father should have made such a promise about her. She considered herself free to choose for herself. So she stormed and wept about it as only a Sun Princess could do, and declared she would never, never marry any man but the man she loved.

"But her old father, who was so indulgent and yielding with her usually, remained firm in his decision, and said he could not break a promise once made, for that would not be honorable. Therefore, the very next day he announced to everybody that a contest in skill and science should take place between the suitors for her hand. The Princess was very unhappy, of course, during the days that followed, but Prince Minio cheered her by saying he felt equal to winning her in a fair contest. His love was far greater than that of the others, and therefore he felt assured he would learn a way to win her for his bride in spite of them all.

"When the great day for the contest came, a large gathering of the suitors was held in an open field at the foot of the Fire Mountains. They were a fine and noble company of young men who contended for Kuldah's hand, and her father said she should have felt proud and glad at such a sight. But she was too sad to feel proud. She had dressed as became a Sun Princess, and her gown was of finely spun gold, embroidered in diamonds. Her white arms and throat gleamed through the thin gauze dress, and a girdle of diamonds encircled her slender waist. From her shoulders fell a train, which swept for yards behind her, and a narrow gold band held her beautiful hair in place. For her hair hung about her in loose masses, falling far below her waist, and mingling its burnt-gold color with that of her brilliant dress, so that one could hardly tell where one ended and the other began. As she stood she looked like a golden Princess, except that her face was as pale as the fleecy clouds overhead.

"In her majestic beauty she let them kneel and kiss her hand. Each one, as he touched her hand, swore in turn to be faithful and true to the knight who should win her, but each one believed secretly he himself would be the winner. Then began the tournament of skill. One showed how he could ride; another how he could mount and dismount, or how he could unhorse an enemy; a third used the gloves or the sword with wonderful dexterity; another engaged in a trial of strength, or swiftness in running; and so on until the long list was completed.

"It seemed to the Princess, as she watched in despair their wonderful deeds, that there was nothing left for her beloved even to attempt. The suitors had all done such marvellous things; and her heart ached within her when she learned from one of her handmaidens that her lover was the last to appear on the lists. Yet, when he did step forth, calm and serene, her heart leaped again to her throat, her confidence returned; for he looked strong and handsome, and it was only with pride and pleasure she gazed upon him. She leaned forward with a smiling face to listen to his words, for he was speaking.

"'O mighty King of the Sun,' he was saying. 'I have one request to make of you before beginning my experiment. If successful in what I undertake, I want your consent to take the Princess away with me from the Sun lands. What I shall try to accomplish to-day is but the beginning of a great problem I wish to work out. It may take thousands of years to complete, and I wish to live in a land of my own choosing, that I may be able to accomplish it.'

"The Sun King, astonished at these words, hesitated to grant such a remarkable request, but the

Princess threw herself at her father's feet, and added her pleadings to the Prince's. Finally the Sun King reluctantly consented; but the other suitors smiled broadly among themselves, as they heard the words, for no matter what the Prince might do they believed he never could show more skill or wisdom than they had already displayed.

"Having bowed smilingly to the King and kissed Kuldah's hand, Prince Minio turned to his competitors and said: 'I have made a close study of the Sun's fire, and I am convinced that, no matter where this fire is sent, it will continue to burn and hold its remarkable glint and its quickening power. It will never be extinguished, but glow brilliantly for ever. Therefore, my experiment in skill to-day shall be made from it alone; it will serve my purpose better than anything else.' So saying, he picked up a huge bowlder from the Fire Mountain nearest him. The stone was so big that it seemed impossible for any one to lift it. But the Prince gathered it up in his arms with a terrific effort, and balancing it perfectly threw it far out into the heavens. It bounded away and rolled into space with tremendous force, making a whirring noise as it dashed along. Again and again he lifted out the big rocks and tossed them off in the distance. It seemed as if he would never tire of this remarkable exhibition of strength. Hundreds and thousands of the brilliantly burning stones went whizzing through space, before the eyes of the astonished spectators. Yet he continued, calmly throwing more and more stones, until the heavens fairly gleamed with millions of burning lights. Thus were the star fires first kindled, and they were truly a magnificent sight, even to the Sun people, accustomed as they were to splendid spectacles.

"As the Prince predicted, the stars have never lost their brilliancy, the Sun's power to warm and enliven all creatures has proved very strong and lasting, and those splendid, flaming signals light the turquoise-blue skies every night, even to this day.

"Finally, Prince Minio selected with great care seven superb stones, even brighter than the rest, and threw them not quite so far from the Sun. In this way they felt the Sun's influence more strongly; though they flew to a good distance they always revolved about their old home. Whizzing and whirling continually, yet never flying away from the Sun, they appeared to the spectators to be the prettiest of all the stars in the sky. Then the Prince, turning to the Princess, who was bewildered with the joy of his brilliant success, bade her choose from the seven stars the one that should be their home. She chose what she thought the loveliest of all the seven, and they named it the Earth!

"The old King unhesitatingly pronounced Prince Minio the victor. For he acknowledged that, beside the great strength the Prince had displayed in lifting the stones from Fire Mountain, the Sun people had never before witnessed such a glorious sight as the star-studded heavens; and even the suitors, though much disappointed, consented in a manly way that he should take Princess Kuldah as his bride, saying he had fairly won her.

"Shortly afterward a marriage of magnificence and splendor followed, and Prince Minio and his charming wife came to the Earth to spend many years. The Earth, owing allegiance to the Sun, never loses sight of him, and though she continues to rush through space at a terrible rate, yet the Sun King always sees her.

"Out of the white mist on the Earth came trooping a wonderful band of little creatures to greet the Sun people. They were very tiny; their skirts of silver glistened like the moonlight, and their jewelled wands sparkled like the dew. These little creatures were fairies, and ever after dwelt among the Earth children, helping to beautify the world. They wander about us in the moonshine and are sometimes caught in the mist, but they can never come out in the sunlight. One of the laws in Fairyland is to be in bed before the dawn. From dusk until dawn the fairies lead a gay life. They hold their revels, they dance, and they travel the world over, frolicking like mad sometimes, but only the Moon's white light shines on their silver dresses.

"Many other charming people adopted the Earth as their home, for it was beautiful to live upon. The Sun Princess and her husband did not object to others coming to their home at all, only, as the strangers came in great numbers, they finally decided to set apart a great space for themselves alone.

They reserved, therefore, a charming bit of country for the Prince's workshop, otherwise there would have been so many interruptions Prince Minio could never hope to accomplish his scientific work. Charming as the Earth people were, they interfered with the Prince's heart's desire. Therefore, he and his friends from the Sun chose a wonderful valley which lay in the heart of a great range of mountains. The valley covered many miles of ground, and it had the most sublime scenery in the world. Rivers ran through it, and big mountains rose suddenly in its midst. Small silver lakes also shone like crystal mirrors. Wonderful springs abounded there; boiling water came out of one, while from the next shot up cool and deliciously sparkling drops. They called the bubbling, spouting springs geysers, and people come from all over the world to see and study them.

"After the Sun people had reserved the country, the Earth people never remained long on that spot; they recognized the law and accepted it, only making short visits to the marvellous place. Sometimes, if one mortal, more daring than the rest, determined to live there, and built him a house, he was promptly punished, for the fairies at once opened a geyser directly under the carefully chosen home and destroyed it entirely. So this beautiful valley of yellow stones and brilliant lights and rushing waters is left to the Sun Princess and her people. It is certainly a valley of enchantment, for it is never very cold and never very hot there, but is an ideal workshop for a Prince. The geysers and boiling pools are just the escaping gas and steam of his big furnaces; for the fires in his furnaces under the earth are kept burning day and night. It is all very mysterious. In one part he has a big hot lake, and in another an ice-cold one. The cold lake is shaped like a human hand, and near it is a big fountain that dashes up clouds of white spray, hundreds of feet high, flecking the green surface of the water with foam.

"Nothing can be more beautiful than this enchanted valley. The fairies are busy beautifying it all the time. They have painted the colors of the rainbow in the rocks, and the great canyon looks now as if millions of jewels were piled up there. For it is a bewildering mass of color. Amethyst, topaz, and emerald tints sparkle everywhere, and when the sunshine pours down on it you feel as if all the wealth of the world must be hidden in the rocks, for they sparkle like diamonds and rubies. As the years go on the valley grows more beautiful, for the Sun Prince and his bride watch it by day,—and of course as the fairies have charge at night it is never neglected.

"When the Sun Prince has finished his great labors and solved his problem, of course, he will close his workshop, and with his lovely bride go back to their home in the Golden Palace of the Sun. But until then his workshop fires will burn. The geysers and fountains will spout up great volumes of water and steam, making the valley one of the wonders of the world. And all the Earth mortals who go there will be made welcome by the fairies."

CHAPTER VII

THE STORY OF THE JEWELLED BEACH

"DO you wonder that I love the story?" said Princess Ethelda, as the guide finished.

"Oh," replied the Moon maidens, almost in one voice, "it is an enchanting history, indeed."

"See," replied the guide messenger, pointing in the distance to a high mountain, "beyond that mountain lies the Beautiful Valley of which I have just told you."

In a little while the merry party had reached the mountain top, and stood gazing in a bewilderment of pleasure at the wonderful valley below. Exquisite lakes and shining silver rivers lay beneath; beautiful hills stretched away in the distance; and the glorious colors in the rocks, which the fairies had painted so vividly, reflected the pinks and yellows in a growing radiance that lighted up the whole valley in splendor. Innumerable rays flashed out in little threadlike flames, flooding the world below in a blaze of color.

"How magnificent it is!" exclaimed the visitors; and the guide was well pleased with their admiration.

I could never describe to you properly the entertainments that followed their arrival, nor the joy of Dorion and Ethelda in meeting the beautiful Sun Princess. Princess Kuldah was as beautiful as ever, and spared no pains to make her brother and his bride and their companions welcome. The Prince, her husband, showed them his wonderful workshop, and they marvelled over the geysers, and listened with awe to the description of his great problem.

The days seemed all too short, and the guests were surprised when the time for their departure arrived. The feasting and dancing and sight-seeing were at last ended in the valley of enchantment; one glorious morning they rose with the Sun, and bidding good-bye to Princess Kuldah and her people, started to meet the black dwarf of the mountains. The same guide would accompany them to the place where they were to meet him. The Princess saw none of them felt much desire to go; Ethelda was particularly downcast, still she bore up bravely, and with a smiling face she began the journey.

Although Ethelda and her companions were charmed with the splendors of the deep, they were still more impressed with delight over the new beauties they discovered upon the land. They had seen the glittering mountains of the Moon and the fiery craters of the Sun, and had wondered at such magnificence, but the Earth's fresh coloring was a revelation. And the Earth had decked herself right royally to receive them. The month was April, and the world, rioting in flowers, was aflame with color. The poppies, yellow and scarlet, burst forth from the meadows' tenderest green. The white petalled, yellow centred daisies came out in thousands to greet them, while the roses, pink and white and red, flashed everywhere. The trees, too, dressed in the earliest Spring green, nodded and waved their long branches in a glad welcome, and the tiny wood violet, modest and sweet, sent forth its perfumed breath in waves of delight, filling the air with sweetness.

"Wonderful—wonderful!" cried Ethelda, throwing herself in an ecstasy of pleasure upon the soft greensward, and gathering handfuls of the flowers to weave into garlands. "I should like to live here always," she said. The Sun Prince shared his bride's delight, but he whispered cautiously: "Take care, sweetheart. Remember a Moon maiden and a Sun Prince can only visit for a twelvemonth. A longer stay would be dangerous; it would keep us here for ever."

"O, yes," answered Ethelda; "I was hardly in earnest when I spoke, for I could not leave my beloved mother sorrowing. Yet I am very happy here."

Days of pleasure passed, on the journey. Days of wonderment too. When the strangers saw how the small seed planted in the ground—warmed by the sun and watered by the rain—throve and became a tiny blade of grass, a delicate flower, or a magnificent tree, this seemed a miracle to them, for nothing ever grows out of the soil of the Moon or the Sun.

One day as they stood on the top of a high mountain they saw a very strange sight. A great sea lay shining in the distance, sparkling and glittering in gold and blue. It washed the shores of magnificent valleys and rich gardens. Fruits and flowers grew in abundance, but the strange sight lay in the fact that the valleys and fruit gardens stretching out so broadly suddenly stopped at a line of yellow sand,—stopped so abruptly that it seemed almost a straight line, it was so clean cut,—and the sand covered hundreds and hundreds of miles of the Earth.

"How queer it looks!" they said among themselves; "not a blade of grass, not a tree, on the barren waste! We have never seen anything like it before. What is it?"

"It will take two stories to explain that wonderful view lying before us," replied the guide.

"Oh, do tell them!" cried the Moon people in chorus; "we love stories"; and they settled themselves to listen.

"Well," began the guide, "the first relates to the Princess Ethelda."

"To me?" asked the Princess in astonishment.

"Yes," answered the messenger; "look closely at the sea beach and tell me what you see."

"Why, great shining jewels seem strewn over the yellow sands," said the Princess, perfectly amazed; and in turn each of the Moon people saw the same.

"Well," continued the messenger, turning to the Princess, "when her Imperial Majesty of the Moon consented to your coming to visit the Earth on your bridal trip, she ordered many wedding presents for you, and in finishing the loveliest that she gave you, it came about that that beach was formed. But I will begin the story of the Jewelled Beach.

"The Moon was shining through a turquoise-blue sky. Now and then a baby cloud passed before her face, but it was so white and airy that it did not even hide the dazzling lights of her silver palace. One could see them perfectly well, shining through the handsome windows.

"Serenely beautiful the Moon Queen moved through her star-studded pathway. She was calm and majestic. As she swung around the celestial circle that night she leaned down lower to watch the golden gleam of a small star shining far in the distance. For many reasons that particular star had occupied her mind of late, and that evening she seemed even more intent upon it than ever. How beautiful it was! Of all the millions of glittering points embroidered on the sky, that small one stood out the brightest. In bold relief its dancing lights sped out over the heavens in friendly twinkle toward the Moon.

"The Moon Queen smiled to herself as she watched, and then out from the jewelled windows of her home suddenly leaped a brilliant crystal light to meet the star rays. From that moment her Imperial Majesty made up her mind on a subject she had long thought of. Turning to one of her handmaidens who stood near, she bade her summon the master mechanic of her empire; when this had been done, and the man stood before her, she asked, in liquid tones, 'How many workmen do I employ in the silver mountains?'

"'Ah, your Majesty,' was the reply, 'you have so many thousands employed there, that it is almost impossible to say.'

"'Good,' replied the Queen thoughtfully, 'I have sore need of thousands now. Bid them all meet me to-morrow. Call them together at the foot-hills of the mountains. Let no man be missing; from the greatest artist in your shops to the humblest workman, let not a sprite dare to forget my command!'

"The master mechanic promised obedience, and bowing low left her presence.

"When the hour arrived that the Queen had named, there gathered at the foot-hills of the mountains all her little workmen. Thousands and thousands of tiny sprites were there, and they glittered from head to toe in shining silver garments; silver dust powdered them until their clothes looked white as frost, and when they moved their sheen was like costly jewels. Talking together, they were wondering why the Queen should have commanded them to meet her at their busiest hour. Except that she was not fond of idlers, and required prompt and vigorous work from her people, she was a gentle mistress;

but now, when they were rushing with the wedding presents for the marriage of her favorite daughter (which was soon to occur), she had called them from their shops. It surely seemed unwise. All work had ceased, for not a sprite in all Moonland was missing. What could it mean?

"At last her Majesty appeared. Her great retinue of nobles and gorgeously dressed maidens accompanied her, and with music and gay laughter they came nearer. Presently the sprites saw the Queen bid her attendants stop where they stood, and unaccompanied she approached the gallant army of her little workmen. She was well worthy the cheers of admiration that broke from their lips as she neared them. Tall and magnificent in form, she looked every inch a Queen, yet her bright blue eyes glowed with a tender light of love, showing a gentle nature, as she bowed her thanks for their affectionate greetings. Her long, fair hair floated softly about her, sometimes clinging to her white dress like threads of gold, and at her slender waist was gathered a graceful silver girdle, caught with a diamond crescent. At last, in all her splendor, she stood

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among them, and as she raised her hand asking for silence, absolute silence fell upon them.

"'My good and loyal subjects,' she began, 'I have come to-day to intrust you with an important but secret work. No one in all the kingdom save yourselves must know of it. When all is completed, I myself will divulge the secret to my people, and I believe it will gladden them. But until then will you faithfully promise to help me and to keep my counsel?'

"'Beloved Queen,' they answered in one loud voice, 'your will is ours; we will obey you gladly.'

"'Then listen, friends and subjects,' the Queen continued with smiling face, 'for this is my command: That you make me a splendid silver ladder! Step by step must it be wrought, and with greatest care, for it must stretch out miles and miles in length. Strong as bands of steel each round must be, but finer in its texture than the gossamer web of the spider. Weave it with the fairies' touch, making it exquisitely light, yet so bright withal that it can easily be seen for thousands of miles. Spare neither care nor labor, beloved subjects, for the ladder must be mine within the week.'

"Days and nights the hammers of the little workmen rang out clearly, like notes of merry music, and the Moon people said among themselves, 'What gorgeous wedding presents our little Princess will receive!' But they never dreamed of the mysterious ladder of glistening silver steps. And the Queen Mother kept her counsel. Only, each night as she sailed across the jewel-laden heavens, she leaned closer to the Earth Star and studied it.

"She saw great valleys and snow-clad mountains, barren deserts and limpid blue seas. She saw, too, great forests and boundless plains; but though her searching eye looked upon every inch of that beautiful bright ball whirling through space, she thought the loveliest spot on the whole globe was on the borders of the largest ocean. That ocean was so big that it measured just one half the star itself. All the other oceans and the land together could be taken up and put upon its broad blue surface.

"This splendid body of water washed the foot of a glorious country. Big mountains, raising their purple heads among the clouds, crept down to feel its cooling depths. Or, higher still, they reared their lofty peaks and held them scornfully aloft; and thus, capped with perpetual snow, they stood beautiful and glorified. Great plains stretched back from its curving yellow beach, and all the fruit one could name grew in the rich valleys. It was the garden spot of the world. Amid its groves of yellow oranges and lemons birds sang deliciously; flowers bloomed throughout the year, and the skies were nearly always sunny. In this earthly paradise palms lazily waved their feathery green arms, and trees grew so big that houses could be cut out of a single trunk. Here it was that the Moon Queen's eye lingered longest, and it was almost with a child's delight she saw the big blue waves roll in and break upon the sand in a fringe of soft white foam.

"The week had passed, and the Queen's ladder was ready. One by one its silver steps were tested; ring by ring its loops were firmly fastened and bound together; for, dainty as it looked, the ladder must be strong for constant use.

"When all was ready the sprites were cautiously sent with it on a secret mission to the Earth. None but the Moon Queen knew their errand; but she smiled to herself, for after all, when completed, it was to be a wedding present and surprise to her favorite daughter.

"Down from the palace crept the little people, carrying their silver treasure. The night being dark, they reached the Earth without being discovered. In a little while they found the ocean beach the Queen so loved,—for it was here the first jewelled rounds of that sparkling ladder should be laid. By the soft light of the stars, the sprites saw that the Earth was very beautiful; but what were those queer, sad sounds they heard, mingling with the breaking of the waves upon the beach? The workmen stopped to listen, and caught the strains of music; then, looking closely at the water, they saw a line of lovely maidens, with flowing golden hair, which they continually combed as they sang. The Moon sprites were quite astonished at the sight. The maidens were surpassingly beautiful, but their song was very sad.

"'Who are you, and why do you sing so sadly?' they called.

"'Alas!' replied the charming creatures, 'we are mermaids. Our father is the Sea King. We have always been as happy as the day is long, until a few years ago, when a terrible misfortune came upon us. One of the prettiest of our sisters was about to be married. We were busy with the preparations for her wedding, gathering the seaweed and the pretty mother-of-pearl shells that float up on the land, to decorate her palace. We had searched carefully our large and magnificent sea-gardens for the finest specimens of weed and shells. But a beautiful shell, brilliantly tinted in every shade of rose and green and blue combined, had been thrown high upon the sandy beach, out of our reach. Our dear sister became too venturesome, and floating on a big wave she grasped the shell she coveted.

"'At that moment, the hideous Gnome King sprang suddenly from behind a rock, and snatching her in his arms ran off. In vain we pleaded with him to restore our lost darling. The cruel monster only laughed, and swore she should become his wife. Her bridegroom of the Sea was almost beside himself with grief when he learned the awful news. He offered his life in exchange for hers, and we gathered together all our jewels for her ransom. But nothing would move the hard heart of the wicked Gnome King, and he still keeps our beloved sister in his power. That is why we sing so mournfully. The monster, finding she would not marry him, carried her to the top of a high mountain, where she could see her beloved home, but never reach it.

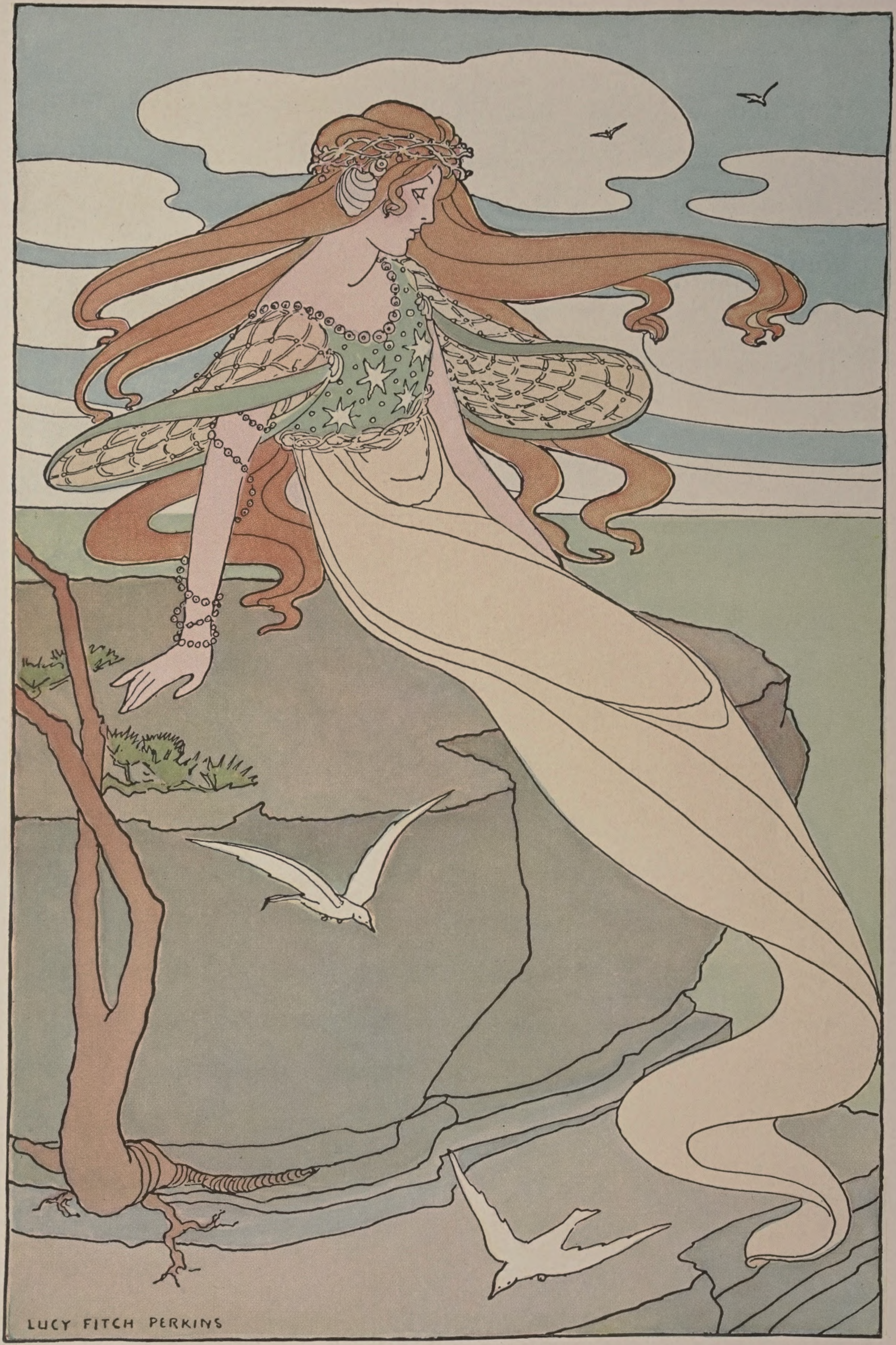
"'She is helpless upon the land, and though she can look down at the foot of the mountains and see the curling waters of her home, she cannot reach it. Her lover sits below, encouraging her with words of love, but he is helpless to reach her. Miserable and longing for home, she watches all the ships that pass, and with her lute sings the most wonderful songs, begging the sailors to rescue her. Many have tried, and the mountain-side is white with the bones of those who have perished in the attempt. For the Gnome King makes mad those who try to save her; they lose their way and die.

"'Alas, kind friends, unless you will help us, we fear she is lost to us for ever.'

"The kind-hearted Moon sprites were certainly touched by this pathetic tale, and they determined among themselves that they would form a plan to outwit the cruel Gnome King, and rescue the sea maid. Of course to do this they would have to delay a little the planting of the Moon ladder, but they felt that her Imperial Majesty would certainly have consented to delay in such a case. So, gathering up their precious burden, they climbed the mountain to seek the sea maid.

"Knowing that she could never reach her sisters alone, and enchanting all the mortals who tried to rescue her, the Gnome King had no guard to watch the maiden. She was left entirely alone upon a big rock overlooking the ocean. The wicked king came at rare intervals to see if she would consent to marry him, but otherwise she was left undisturbed.

"The Moon sprites, however, were not affected by the King's enchantments, so they had no difficulty in reaching her. Suddenly the mermaid saw a gleam of brilliant silver flooding the darkness behind her, and in a moment she was surrounded by a thousand little silver-dressed creatures. At the same moment the Moon sprites caught sight of a glimmering


LUCY FITCH PERKINS

"A GLIMMERING *figure sitting on a high cliff.*" (Page 106)

figure of matchless beauty sitting on a high cliff. The maiden was a vision of loveliness. Long, waving, golden hair floated about her, and her eyes were the color of the sea. She held a lute in her hand; as her fingers moved softly across it, it gave forth a weird but beautiful sound, and to this accompaniment she sang charmingly. Quickly the Moon sprites told her of the plan for rescuing her, and joyfully she listened.

"They carefully suspended the silver ladder from her mountain cliff. Holding it tight between them to steady it, they flung it swiftly down until its brilliant steps touched the trembling water. At this moment they heard a faint noise like rumbling thunder, and the affrighted maiden bade them hurry with their work, as it was the signal that the Gnome King would soon visit her. In a twinkling they seized the maiden in their arms, and carried her down the brilliant steps. They were not a moment too soon, for hardly had they placed the maiden in her bridegroom's arms and picked up their ladder, when the Gnome King and his legion of wicked gnomes were swarming on the mountain-top.

"The rage of the wicked King was fearful to see, but it was useless. He could not regain the mermaid and he could not harm a Moon sprite; but in his anger he pelted the beach with stones, venting his fury in destroying its beauty. Small but ugly, they fell in thousands, covering the golden yellow of the sand, and hiding its glistening splendor. Thus he showered his spite upon the beautiful playground of the mermaids.

"But the Sea King's daughters were too happy over the return of their beloved sister to fret very much. True, their charmingly beautiful beach seemed ruined, but their beloved sister was home again. Thousands, indeed millions, of little stones were piled about in ugly confusion, and marred the soft, bright sand the sea people so loved, but they were powerless to prevent it. The Moon sprites went back to their work of fastening the moon-ladder to the Earth, and the Sea King invited them to remain for his daughter's wedding the next night.

"The wedding spectacle was certainly a grand one, for the Ocean Monarch had ordered the greatest fireworks in his kingdom in honor of the event.

The sea blazed up as though it were burning. Flames seemed to leap and flare up everywhere, and thousands of brilliant colors mixed and trembled in its depths. The phosphorescence was wonderful, and wherever the eye could reach, the brilliant lights shone and sparkled. The Moon sprites were amazed at such magnificence. The night was as brilliant and beautiful as day; and they felt that the wonders of the Earth world were great indeed.

"Just then a messenger arrived from her Imperial Majesty of the Moon, saying that she had watched her workmen rescuing the maiden, and had seen the wedding festival and the splendid illumination, and before recalling her little people to the Moon, she wished to give the bride a present. The wicked Gnome King had tried to ruin the playground of the mermaids, but she would restore it, making it more interesting and fascinating than ever.

"It was a royal gift the Moon Queen gave. She said that henceforth the beach should be enchanted. The hideous stones the gnomes had thrown should not ruin it after all, but should make it more precious to the world, for they should all turn to shining jewels. She chose to make the white pebbles the loveliest of them all, and so change them that the sea people could never forget her. These stones shone as clear as crystal, and in the pure depths of each one there trembled a moon-ray, a memento of her crystal kingdom. This brilliant ray glistened like a diamond, caught and held a prisoner, and was from that day called the moonstone. But it was hard indeed to choose the prettiest of the beach jewels. For opals clear as water, and with fire from the sea, sparkled beside the moonstones; sardonyx, chrysoprase, and emerald, jasper, aquamarine, and topaz, were piled so high that the beach was soon most widely known.

"The Earth people come in hundreds to seek these treasures, making them into precious necklaces and charms. But though they carry thousands and thousands away with them each day, the mermaids smile and do not mind at all, because the Moon-ladder, uncoiling every night in sparkling brilliancy, reaches down from the silver palace and touches the beach like a magician's wand, and the mermaids know that so long as the shining steps of brilliant silver shall rest upon these sands, just so long will the beach continue enchanted, and splendid jewels be formed in such glittering quantities that they will last for ever."

CHAPTER VIII

THE LOST OCEAN

THE little company seemed well pleased with the explanation of the jewelled beach, but as soon as the messenger ceased, they asked for the explanation of the trackless sands.

"That is a longer story; shall I tell it now?" was the reply.

"O yes, do," said the Princess Ethelda. "We are not a bit tired, and it is so pleasant to look down on the very spot while you tell us."

Thus encouraged, the guide messenger began:—

"Ages ago, when the world was young, three great Kings ruled in the universe, the Sun King, the Ocean King, and the Earth King. The Earth King owned all the land of the world, and often travelled over it, watching it and caring for it. He was frequently accompanied by his favorite daughter, the beautiful Princess Selene. She was a graceful maiden of about eighteen. Her lovely brown eyes and long, wavy, golden-brown hair, and her white skin and pink cheeks, made her a very charming picture indeed. Being a fun-loving, merry little maiden, her cheerful disposition made her a delightful companion, so her father was always pleased to have her travel with him.

"On one of these journeys the young Princess seemed more serious than usual, and one morning she came to her father with a request which greatly surprised him. However, when he found her heart quite set upon it, he made up his mind to grant it. She said she had long contemplated doing her share of work in the world, and that she did not think she wished always to remain just a fun-loving and pleasure-seeking young woman. She asked her father to give her a portion of his vast kingdom to cultivate as a garden, declaring she would make it the most beautiful garden in the world, a sort of earthly paradise.

"As soon as her father consented to her wish, she chose a charming spot. It was on the borders of a great sea, and back of it were magnificent mountains. A large gulf, too, stood near, whose waters flowed into a shimmering sea beyond. Here Princess Selene, having chosen hundreds of companions, took up her abode. She planted trees for shade and sowed grass for a quiet, restful color, and then she laid out her garden according to a well-thought-out plan.

"I could never begin to tell you in a short story how wonderfully beautiful she made it. Fruit trees of all descriptions grew there; lemons and oranges, citrons and bananas, peaches and apricots, flourished—everything nice you can think of. She did not forget the flowers, either. Magnolias and acacias, poinsettias and jasmines, and every Southern flower you could name, bloomed beautifully. Lovely birds flocked there, and rested in the cool trees, singing to the flowers and filling the garden with delicious music. The Princess and her companions worked hard and faithfully, and the garden became the most charming spot imaginable. All the world talked about it and came to visit it.

"The country about was very attractive. Great snow-capped mountains rose abruptly from the sea, and white clouds, nestling down to touch them, hovered like angels' wings above the rich valleys as though in protection. The clouds were seldom dark, for it rarely rained there, and the sunny blue skies seemed to smile perpetually.

"Now, the powerful Sun King had many sons, but one of them was especially handsome, and, better than that, he was the soul of honor and truth. He was called Prince Corus. He often came to Earth to visit the Ocean King's family, for one of the sons was his favorite companion. The two young men were inseparable; they were devoted to each other, and fond of the same sports.

"When the Ocean King's son, Prince Fronto, grew to manhood, his father gave him control of a smaller kingdom, a beautiful sea that washed the shores of Princess Selene's famous gardens. This sea was reached by sailing through the blue waters of the gulf; shining and beautiful, it stretched for miles and miles through a magnificent country. It was on the shores of this sea that the two Princes spent most of their time, and it was here one day that they came across the lovely Selene and her maidens. Both the young men felt at once that they had never before seen anything so perfectly charming as the Princess, and they lost no time in learning to know her.

"She treated them with the greatest courtesy; and in a little while the three had become firm friends, and spent many happy hours together. The young men did not attempt to disguise from themselves the fact that they both loved this royal maiden; but the Sun Prince, in a spirit of nobleness, offered to leave his friend Fronto alone to win her hand, though in losing her he would become the most miserable man in the world. Up to this point, however, Fronto apparently showed a similar generosity of spirit, and putting his arm about his friend, urged him to remain, saying: 'We will abide by the decision of the Princess. Let her choose between us, and whoever wins her love shall marry her, letting the other suitor swear friendship to them both.'

"'So be it,' replied the generous Prince Corus, for it seemed a fair proposition. 'Much as I care for her, I will promise to give her to you gladly if she loves you; for, after her, I love you best in the world.'

"They clasped hands, and swore a solemn oath to abide by this agreement.

"Selene was in no hurry to choose, and seemed equally fond of them both. Never by word or sign did she show which she preferred. Always together, the three wandered through her gardens, plucking the fruit or listening to the songs of the birds. The two young men came every day to see her, and strove to invent plans for her amusement. Corus brought his father's golden chariot, and often the three took a mad race across the sky. But the maiden was never afraid. She loved the spirited, prancing steeds, and their flashing golden harness; and the wild ride brought a glorious color to her cheeks. She thrilled with pleasure when the rushing wind blew back her flowing hair, and her eyes caught a deeper blue from the heavens, and sparkled and danced with delight, so that Corus and Fronto thought her more bewitching than ever.

"Again, Fronto would invite them to see his father's famous sea-gardens, and they would ride across the sapphire-blue waves until they reached a rocky island. Here they would rest, to watch the seals climbing over the rocks. They amused themselves long, laughing at the awkward antics of the fat baby seals, who would tumble with loud splashes into the water, and then frolic about noisily. The Princess loved these famous sea-gardens; they were very different from her own, but wonderfully interesting, nevertheless. Every sea-plant grew there. Huge trees of seaweed were plainly seen, and curious water-flowers in abundance. Magnificent shells bordered the walks, shells dyed with the mystic colors of the sea,—blue and green and opalescent,—others pink-lined, like the sky at sunset, or brilliant red, like the coral reef. Charming gold-fishes swam about these water-gardens, and their scales, glowing like fire, sent out great sparks of light. Mermaids floated through, with long golden hair and starry blue eyes, singing low to the music of their lutes. Thus many days and weeks were passed, and each hour the young Princes grew more madly in love with the charming Princess Selene.

"At last a day came when they could no longer resist asking her to choose between them. But when they stood before her, and waited for her answer in silence, the fun-loving little Princess suddenly became grave, and said most seriously: 'Why make me choose at all? Your friendship may be broken if I do, and I could not bear that.'

"'You need not fear for us, sweet Princess,' said Fronto, 'for we have sworn an oath, and will not break it.'

"Selene gazed earnestly at them, not understanding this reply. Then Corus, pale as death, nodded assent, saying: 'It is even true, fair Selene; as you cannot choose but one, we both have promised allegiance to the one you favor. We love you too sincerely to do otherwise.'

"A brilliant color dyed Selene's cheek as she heard these words, and turning to Prince Fronto she began softly: 'So be it. We have passed many happy hours together, and in my heart, Prince Fronto, I have a deep affection for you.'

"Hearing her speak thus, Prince Corus grew very white, and turned away to hide his pain, whispering to himself: 'They shall not see how I suffer. I have sworn an oath, and I will keep it.'

"But whatever the Princess continued to say to the Ocean Prince, it seemed not to please him. Finally she said to him, while she turned and beckoned to his friend: 'Therefore, kind brother of the shimmering sea, you must forgive me; for, though I love you as a friend, my heart belongs to Corus, and him I choose to be my husband.'

"The Sun Prince could hardly believe he heard aright; but as the beautiful girl turned shyly toward him, he caught her hand, and kneeling, kissed it, thanking her for his great happiness.

"The Ocean Prince showed great surprise at Selene's words, because he had always thought she preferred him to Corus; indeed, it was because of this he had made the compact so readily. Swiftly now his thoughts grew black with anger, but the two lovers were talking together and did not notice it. Soon he grew calmer; outwardly he seemed to be peaceful, and stooping, he too kissed Selene's hand, and swore friendship to the two.

"Preparations began for the wedding, and each day, as the ceremony drew nearer, Fronto seemed happier. He really acted as though he had forgotten his wish to marry Selene. This, of course, made Corus and his bride more contented; they could not bear to be merry, and feel that Fronto was suffering. But the Ocean Prince was only pretending. Instantly, on leaving the lovers on the day of their betrothal, he had gathered together all the little demons and wicked imps he knew, and employed them to build big mountains on the shores of his sea. Soon precipitous mountains gathered in clusters about the water's edge. They seemed only barren rock, as they loomed up from the flat sand, like watch-towers guarding a prison. Selene and Corus teased the Ocean Prince for building such ugly peaks, but he did not mind their jests. Finally he had his dominions hedged in with a dark-hued rocky range.

"Then, one day when the Sun Prince was absent, he deliberately carried out the plan he had so carefully concealed: he stole the Princess and hid her in the caverns of his great mountains. When Corus returned, broken-hearted and distressed over the loss of his bride and the treachery of his friend, and demanded her release, the Sea Prince absolutely refused to give her up — laughing to scorn his friend's demand.

"War, of course, immediately followed. The Sun Prince was no slight enemy, for all his father's powerful forces were at his command. The heavy bowlders piled up by the wretched little fiends the Ocean Prince had employed were not easily surmounted, however, for they were splendidly built. It would take years to pull them down. So Corus determined he would not even try. He would rescue his beloved bride in a simpler but more powerful manner, and in less time.

"A great river ran through the country, from the inland sea down to the blue waters of the ocean. Now, the Sun Prince closed up that river, shutting off all communication between the ocean and the inland sea. The Sea Prince laughed at first when he saw this. He had so much water in his own sea he never dreamed it could be exhausted.

"But now the Sun Prince tried new measures. As the tides could not bring the water to the foot of the big mountains to replenish them, he sent down burning rays upon the sea to dry it up. Evaporation began. Day by day the water decreased, and shrunk away slowly from the white face of the sand and the red sides of the mountains.

"A hundred feet of the water fell quickly, and then Fronto saw that the Sun Prince, in drying up the water, could doom him and his followers to death. Panic-stricken, he restored the Princess, and begged for mercy.

"Corus, though happy to have his beloved bride again, felt that the awful crime Fronto had committed should not be treated lightly. His punishment must serve as a warning to the world. Still, at the request of his gentle-hearted bride, he forgave his false friend, and sent him back safe with his companions to the Ocean King. However, he forced Fronto to remain in his father's dominions for ever, saying that he had proven, by his treachery, he was unfit to govern a kingdom of his own. Moreover, that kingdom should exist no longer. He would dry it up and make it a huge desert, to mark the spot of a false friend's perfidy.

"So the Sun never relaxed his fierce gaze, nor the wind its hot breath. Together they scorched the seabed until the water disappeared, and the bottom looked like a huge white bowl. Then slowly the desert formed. The fierce heat became so intense that even the rains refused to fall there, and the earth was too salty to allow anything to grow. Every living creature shunned it. Neither bird nor beast would visit it, and thus it remained for thousands of years.

"When you are in the bottom of this bowl, you are nearly three hundred feet below the ocean. Upon all sides are great mountains, some over ten thousand feet high; and this spot is the hottest place in the world. The desert looks like a great plain leading out to the horizon. The soil is almost as fine as white flour.

"But, silent and deserted as it is, the Sun Prince declared that, because his beloved bride had been kept there, it should still be sacred in his eyes—still retain a certain fascination. So, in all its desolation, it does possess a weird beauty of its own. The sand dunes reflect the light of the sky. They are sometimes deep blue, sometimes topaz yellow, and again, at sunset, a brilliant rose.

"The quiet of the desert is profound, save when some whirling sand-storm blows. Then all living creatures caught there are lost unless they lie flat and cover heads and mouths. Except for this, the air is always magnificent. At times, it is all covered with a pink mist; at other times, it is a pure golden haze. The mountains, too, are in changing shades of purple and lilac and blue, with golden and blood-red colors mingled.

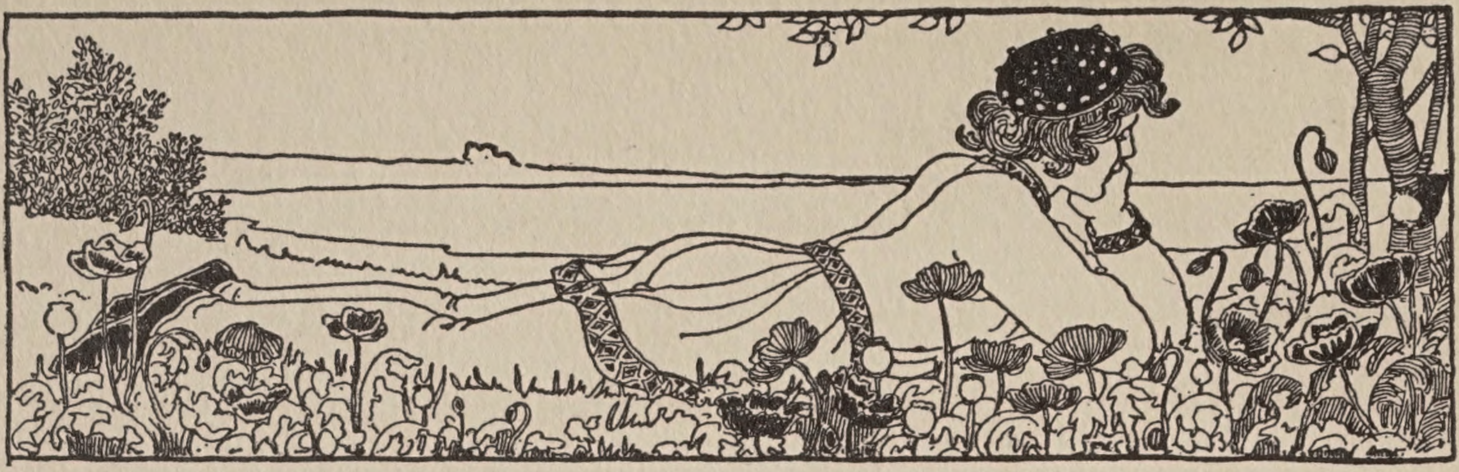
"All these years the place has remained a desert, —a monument to the treachery of Prince Fronto. Yet the bitterness of the Sun Prince seems to be lessening. Perhaps the sweet pleading of the beautiful Selene has won forgiveness, for of late that awful waste shows signs of life. True, its great mesas, in gray and gold, bordering its lonely hundreds of miles, are rocky and barren still; but now and then a green bush of elder arises on the sands, and the cacti and greasewood are beginning to flourish well. This is the first sign of life, but it means surely that Prince Corus has relented, and will remove the curse that 'nothing shall ever live there.'

"Occasionally, too, an animal has been seen running across the dry, parched sands, and birds that once flew hundreds of miles to avoid the hot plains now skim lightly across them. Then, at times, trees and green grass and cool fresh lakes of water are visible. These last disappear quickly when one approaches and tries to drink from their curling waves. Wise people call these sights mirages, but perhaps, after all, they are real, and foreshadow what the desert will become.

"The Sun Prince is wise and merciful, and though justice must be done, when justice is appeased he can restore the cooling streams and vegetation to the parched sands. Some day, perhaps, the magic spell will be withdrawn from the mysterious desert, and its shining seas again smile beneath sunny skies. Even now, Prince Corus occasionally sends a great cloudburst to drench the scorching plains. At first, we know, he did not love the barren waste. It brought back too keenly the sorrow of his stolen bride; but time has softened that feeling, and with his beloved Princess by his side, he looks down and smiles upon its glare and glitter. He shows this in the wonderful sky effects above it. They are things of beauty. If clouds gather, he tips them with rainbow colors,—brilliant reds and oranges, purples and greens, melting into delicious pinks, soft lilacs, and grays. The sunset there is a glorious sight never to be forgotten.

"Its mountains, too, are beautiful. Often the ridges are clear-cut and sharp. Again, when the Sun pours his heat upon them, they seem as flat as the palm of your hand. They change color frequently, for at times startling reds and yellows and pinks are painted in stripes all over them. Later the canyons are flashing in brilliant needle-like points of superb color, but again they are a dull blue or gray, and lose their splendor.

"But most sublime of all the sights is still the mirage. Trembling and glowing in the sea, lie trees and mountain peaks, reflected clear and beautiful. Maybe it is only the reflection of the golden haze that lies in the canyons at sunset; but whatever it is, it is one of the desert's splendors. And though the lilac mist and the purple shadows that creep between the valleys and climb the mountains seem more natural to its desolation and its silence, yet the glory of that mirage — glittering with its dazzling hue, and flashing its strange lights like the rays from a fire-opal — will cling the longest in one's memory."



CHAPTER IX

THE STORY OF PRINCESS SUNSET

WHEN the story of the great desert or the lost ocean had been told, the little company of Moon people thanked the guide for his tales, and again started on their journey. Soon they approached the borders of a beautiful wood. The guide told them that he would turn back when they had travelled through the forest, for on the other side of the forest the black dwarf awaited them.

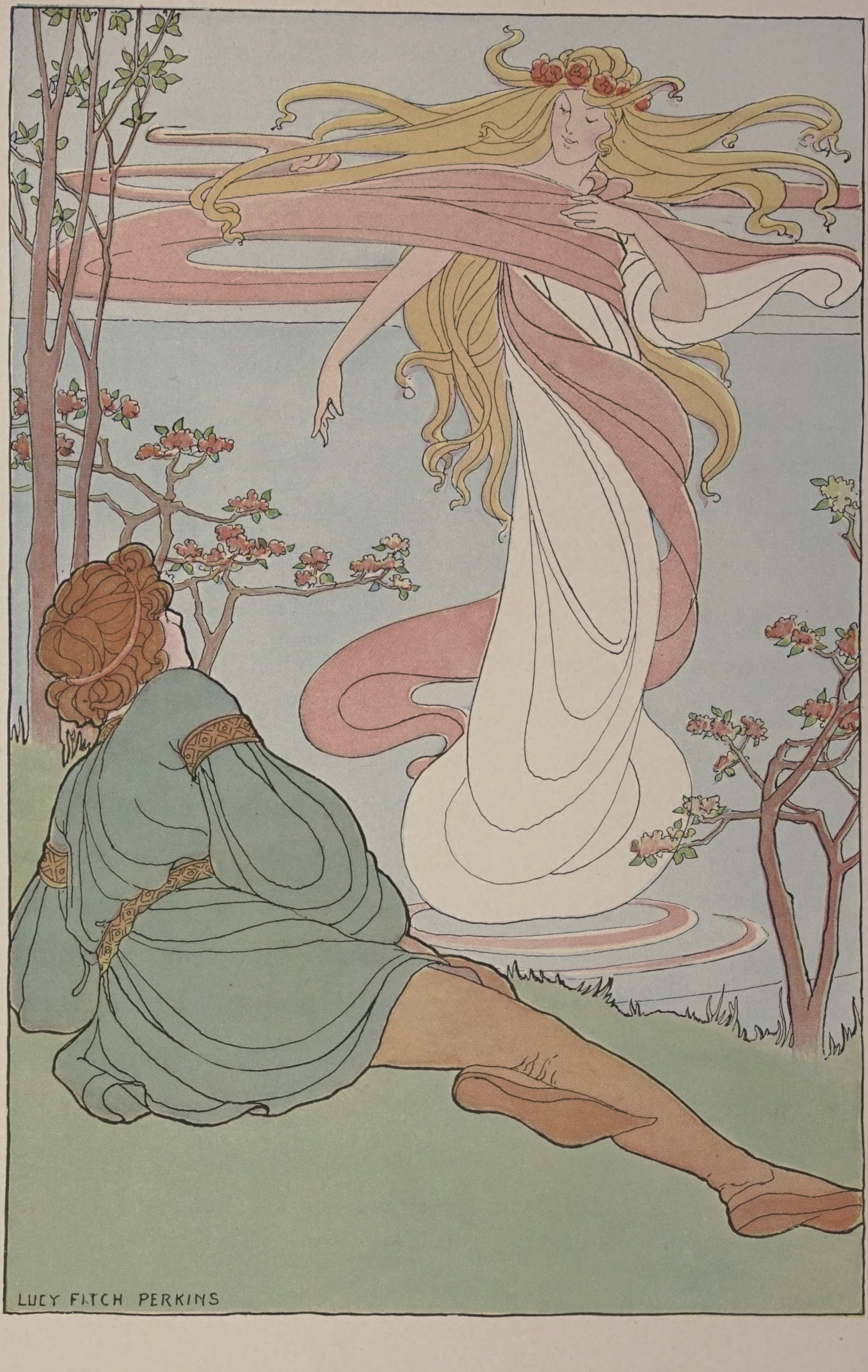
Princess Ethelda shuddered as she heard, but being a brave little Princess, she turned laughingly to the guide and said, "Well, Sir Guide, cannot you tell us another pretty story before you go?"

"Willingly," replied the guide, and he at once began the story of Princess Sunset.

"Once upon a time there lived in the heart of a great forest, something like this we are passing through, a young Prince with his two elder brothers. They lived in a splendid palace, and were fond of hunting and shooting; but they were also frequently at war with their neighbors, so that fighting of some sort always seemed to be going on. This youngest was named Oswald; though he always accompanied his brothers to war, and was the very bravest of all the knights, he thought it was useless to fight about everything. Life would be much happier if people were kind and peace-loving; and unless there were a serious question to fight about, he did not believe in fighting at all. He much preferred to roam the forest, studying the sky and the trees, or the lovely waters of the clear blue lakes. He would spend hours thus, musing on the wonderful works of Nature, and wondering where she kept her marvellous paint-box.

"Now, Prince Oswald was very good-looking. He was tall and slender as the young saplings about him, but he was powerful and strong of limb, too; and when his brothers told him to choose a wife among the pretty maidens of the land, almost any of the princesses would have been glad to be chosen. But Prince Oswald was in no hurry to choose; he did not fall in love very easily, and he thought he would just wait until the right princess came along.

"One day, when lying on the shore of a beautiful body of water, he noticed that the sky was suddenly tinged with red. He rubbed his eyes with amazement, but the red hue tinged every object that he looked upon; the treetops, the lake, and the deer that glided along the edge of the forest had a delicate crimson splendor. In the midst of this fairy spectacle he heard a musical voice sigh, and turning around saw a radiantly beautiful woman standing near him. Her countenance was lovely, and her glorious brown eyes were sparkling with light. She smiled as she looked upon him, and for a minute her teeth gleamed white as little pearls between her red lips. Her splendid golden hair hung in soft masses below her waist, and the wind was blowing it softly about. Her garments were loose and flowing, and variegated in color, shading from the tenderest pink to the deepest crimson. The wonderful dyes of her dress seemed to float away from her in rosy clouds, and blend in the air until the rich


LUCY FITCH PERKINS

"*TURNING around he saw a radiantly beautiful woman near him.*" (Page 130)

rose-color around glowed and deepened to a magnificent red.

"As Oswald stood gazing upon this gorgeous maiden, she addressed him in a low and charming voice: 'O, dreamer of the woods, am I not worth seeking? Why do you waste your life in idleness here? Look for me in the land that lies westward, beyond the setting of the sun. There may be many obstacles in your path, but, overcoming them, you will find your bride awaiting you. Am I not worth the winning?'

"For answer, Oswald sprang forward to clasp her in his arms, but at that instant the red light glowed more brightly about her, flaring to a brilliant flame; and thus standing in its midst, she disappeared in a sea of fire, leaving the sky and water a dull, heavy gray.

"Prince Oswald returned to the palace deeply wrapped in thought, and indeed he could think of nothing but the beautiful maiden he had seen. The next morning he determined he would seek and find her, because until he did he felt he could never be happy again. After making preparations to go, and bidding his brothers good-bye, he started alone to seek the Land of the Setting Sun. First he found the spot by the lake where, the evening before, he had watched the glorious beauty of the strange maiden, and he sat down in silence. Again the sky took on its delicate rose, deepening until the ruby splendor of the clouds piled themselves into gold and crimson palaces. From one of these palaces Oswald felt confident his beautiful lady would emerge, and tremblingly he sat expectant. Suddenly the same peculiar sigh met his ears, and turning to greet the lovely stranger, he saw to his disappointment only a glittering sword. The blade was, of course, of shining steel, but the handle was formed of one magnificent ruby. The radiance from this superb jewelled handle was magnificent. It gleamed and sparkled in flaming red, until the whole western world glowed with the bright reflection.

"Oswald realized with a beating heart that it was a message from the mysterious lady, and he lifted the sword to his side. Then feeling brave enough to meet any dangers because she had sent him the sword, he started on his travels to the Land of the Setting Sun. Over hills and prairies, but always toward the west, Prince Oswald travelled. He rested by night only, and at early dawn was off again. On the third night he saw a bright light ahead, and on approaching it found it to be a beautiful princess. She was dressed in a gown of spun silver, and on her forehead there shone one magnificent star. She greeted him kindly, and told him she was the Evening Star, and would light him through the dark forest. He thanked her gratefully, and accompanied her in among the dark and gloomy trees. She glided ahead, and the light from the beautiful star crown showed him the way, even in the darkest places. Evening Star told him she recognized him in the distance by the ruby-hilted sword he wore. 'You seek the Princess Sunset,' she continued, 'do you not?'

"'Yes,' replied Oswald, 'and I shall never rest until I find her.'

"'Alas!' said Evening Star, 'though I sincerely wish you success, I must tell you that many difficulties will beset you, for of all the young men who have passed this way in quest of the golden-haired Princess not one has ever returned. The obstacles that have beset them have proven too great, and they have never yet been able to rescue her.

"'She is wonderfully beautiful, though, and I am not surprised that you seek her. Once I met her face to face, and I could never forget what a vision of beauty she was. It was a charming evening, and I had risen over the purple hills a little earlier than usual. Tall and majestic the Princess stood upon the hilltop, clothed in her marvellous dress of crimson. Her great brown eyes looked questioningly into mine, and her splendid hair floated back from her lovely face in a sort of golden mist, while the breeze blew her long, trailing robes across the sky. Her exquisite form stood plainly outlined thus for several minutes, and the crimson colors from her garments tinged the heavens from a delicate pink to a brilliant ruby-red. Then suddenly stretching forth her arms toward me, she greeted me with a tender smile of welcome, and vanished. Never shall I forget her charm. She was the daughter of a great king and lived in a splendid palace, but she was as gentle and tender-hearted as a child. Her great delight was to roam the woods, gathering flowers and weaving them into a gorgeously colored robe. The brighter the flower the better she loved it. Red, yellow, blue, all were gathered and woven together, until the dress was a miracle of beauty and brightness. Her gown was so brilliant, that when she wore it the very skies reflected the colors, and she would stand upon the hilltop and let the flowing skirts trail out in long, loose lines across the heavens. This was her delight.

"'People came from far and wide to see the Sunset Princess in her flower dress, for when she wore it she was marvellously beautiful. Among them once came a wicked magician, and the moment his eyes fell upon her he determined to marry her. So, to gain his end, he killed her father and her brothers, and destroyed all her people. Then he stole her, and hid her in his western palace; and there he has kept her a prisoner ever since. But she declares she will never, never marry such a cruel monster, even if she should never escape, and he cannot marry her without her consent.

"'Now, the poor Princess has the power to appear in a dream to any one she wishes to come and deliver her from the wicked old magician's power. But this is her only privilege. She can never stir from his palace (except in dreams) unless by his especial invitation. Once every day he invites her to come forth. At the sunset hour he calls her, and with her maidens she walks out upon a spacious balcony. But she is a brave princess, and she courageously wears her crimson flower dress, and gives him only scornful looks.

"'The magician occasionally invites her out on the balcony for a cruel purpose — to show her the fate of each brave knight who tries to rescue her. Sometimes the gallant youth is already dead. Sometimes the wicked magician changes him into some four-footed creature before her eyes, making him wander upon the earth afterward as an animal. Alas! dear Prince,' continued Evening Star, sadly, 'I dread to see you go upon this dangerous expedition.'

"'Do not fear for me,' answered Oswald, bravely. 'At last, I have learned where the beautiful Princess of my dreams is imprisoned. No matter what the dangers are, I will find her and rescue her.'

"Indeed, he was so rejoiced at the news brought by Evening Star that he slept with a light heart that night, and at early dawn started again toward the Setting Sun. Every evening the sky was tinged with the lovely red, but he had no other sign from the Princess.

"One night he stopped at a castle where he met the beautiful daughter of a wealthy and powerful duke. After a handsome banquet and ball given in his honor, where the young countess paid him the highest honors, the duke approached him, and offered to give him her hand in marriage if he would remain and help to govern the people.

"Now, Oswald was very grateful for all this kindness, but his heart was too full of the Sunset Princess to think of any other maiden. So, after thanking the duke courteously, he declined the honor. The young countess tossed her pretty head in disdain when she heard he loved another, and told him he was a fool for his pains, and that he would never rescue the Sunset Princess.

"But Oswald was not discouraged by her words, and continued his journey.

"That night he approached another forest, so dark and gloomy that he could not see his hand before him. But he remembered the red light that shone from his ruby-handled sword, and when he held it up he saw the path quite plainly before him. He heard dreadful squeaking noises all about him; groans and sudden cries and many dangers beset him.

"Presently a hideous giant arose. He was tall, and had green eyes, which he rolled awfully, and he gnashed his long white teeth as Oswald came along.

"'You cannot enter my country,' he growled loudly, and for a moment Oswald felt he did n't want to enter it, because he saw (by the red light of his sword) a man being bitten to death by two horrid snakes. One snake was blue and one was white.

"But Prince Oswald was brave as could be, and he could not see the man being killed, without helping him; so he dashed forward, and in one instant had killed both snakes with his shining blade, and rescued the man.

"But just as he thought he had won a victory, a great swirling current of water appeared at his feet, and he leaped back only in time to escape a blow from the tail of a great black dragon. Now he knew the forest was bewitched; but he continued his journey, and all day long he fought for his life. Sometimes it was with wild beasts, and sometimes with the magician in person; but Oswald never let go his sword for one minute, and the great magic of its blade protected him.

At last the cool shadows of evening began to fall, and the goblins became less and less troublesome.

'Then suddenly he perceived in his path a beautiful maiden. She seemed almost a phantom, for floating around and about her was a ghostly mist. But for all that, she was wondrously fair, with an unearthly sort of beauty. Her eyes shone like stars out of her snowy draperies, and her voice had a far-away sound, like the tinkle of silver bells.

"'O Prince of the Wonderful Sword,' she said, 'you have done me a great favor. I am the White Lady of the Mist, and my golden shuttle was stolen by the wicked old magician who stole the Sunset Princess. I could do nothing without it, for all my power lies in its magic. In fighting and overcoming the magician's imps in the forest to-day you have restored it to me; his snares can never more affect me. So, now, I will prove that my power is restored, and that I am free again, by serving you. I will blind these wicked enemies of yours, so that they will seek you in vain, and I will conduct you safe this night through the Forest of Terrors.'

"So saying, she began weaving with the shuttle, and a wondrous weaving it was, for long streamers of mist floated like a white veil over the forest. Little by little the ghostly vapor covered everything. Faster and faster she wove, singing softly as she did so a curious kind of rhyme:—

"'Wonderful Shuttle, weaving for me,
Cover each shrub and cover each tree;
Then, while my fairies dance and sing,
Straight through the forest this brave knight bring!'

"Gradually great clouds of white formed everywhere. Their gauzy vapor thickened as they rolled away and enclosed the whole forest. Nothing could be seen but the wonderful little Lady of the Mist, and she stood shining and gleaming like silver in the centre of the ghostly shroud. At last, when all was snowy white, she stopped singing, and bade the knight follow her. Always through the thick veil he could see her shining bright and clear, and thus she conducted him through the dark forest. But the magician's imps could not see a thing, and though Oswald heard them fighting and snarling, they did not trouble him again.

"At break of day, on the edge of a beautiful lake, she left him; but he was in full view of the magician's elegant palace. The Lady of the Mist bade him remain in hiding until the sunset hour, and when the Princess came out to view his dead body (or the wicked magician's skill in changing him into some animal), he must hold his gleaming sword in front of him, and boldly advance to her side. The White Lady of the Mist promised to aid him at the critical moment, and she would give him a sign to advance and rescue the Princess: it would be a veil of mist descending the mountain. He must not rush forward until the mist appeared, however, as she could not help him while the sun shone.

"The Prince promised faithfully to follow her instructions, though it was hard to wait all day. He walked around the lake, keeping well in the bushes, and finally hiding himself beneath the Princess's balcony.

"The magician's palace was truly magnificent, for it was built all of solid black ebony. It was very gloomy and terrible to look upon, but also very costly, Oswald could see. The great arches of ebony that upheld the balcony were inlaid with glittering gold and diamonds, so that the palace sparkled brilliantly in the sunlight. But a black palace was an unusual sight, and one felt at a glance that it was the abode of a magician. The floor of the balcony was inlaid with a border of splendid white pearls, and precious rugs lay on the floor. Costly jewels were scattered carelessly about in quantities, for the magician felt if he lost anything his magic could easily restore it. Enticing fruit gardens grew down to the borders of the lake, and handsome trees spread out their cool green branches. The place was so lovely it seemed a shame that such a wicked old magician should own it.

"Toward evening, when the sun was low, the magician came out and angrily called for the Princess. It was plain to see he was in a very bad humor. He had heard of the golden shuttle being restored to the White Lady of the Mist, and he was fearful of her power against him. He did not know, however, that Oswald was the knight who had been successful in restoring it, for he had given such strict instructions to his imps of the forest, that he felt sure Oswald had not escaped death.

"Prince Oswald's heart beat very fast as he saw the palace door open. When the lovely Princess, pale but proud and noble in her bearing, stepped forth, he could hardly restrain himself from falling at her feet. He was bewitched by her beauty, for she was far lovelier than he had supposed. But he dared not venture forth without the signal from the White Lady of the Mist. Presently, as he waited impatiently, he saw creeping down the mountain-side the thin white veil. It rolled out in clouds, for the White Lady realized she had a great work to do. The old magician, however, did not see the mist, because his face was turned the other way. He could not understand why his imps did not hurry across the lake with Prince Oswald, as they had done with the other knights. They should suffer for this delay on the morrow, he growled.

"But Prince Oswald understood the delay. The little imps had not caught him; and he also knew by the thickly forming mist it was time to act. Grasping his shining sword firmly in his right hand, in one swift bound he reached the Princess's side. He caught her hand in his, and she clung to him in pure joy and delight. At that moment the magician turned and saw them standing together. With a loud cry of rage he sprang toward them, but it was too late.

"At this minute great clouds of mist rolled over them and completely covered their forms. Everything was shrouded in ghostly white, and volumes of vapor continued to roll down the mountain-sides. Faster and faster came the heavy veil, completely blinding the magician. But Oswald picked the Princess lightly up in his arms, and holding his gleaming ruby sword before him as a lantern, ran easily through the fog. He reached the lake and found it as clear as crystal, and saw no sign of the mist except behind them. Evening Star shone brightly in the heavens to light them across the dimpling waters, and she had placed a lovely canoe in the green bushes for them. All this time the White Lady of the Mist was hanging her curtains behind the lovers, while her golden shuttle was weaving them so thick, that even the magician's sharp eyes could not penetrate their folds.

"Prince Oswald and his Princess now saw clearly, and Evening Star directed their footsteps. When far from the wicked magician, and safe, they sat down to rest. Oswald told the Princess how much he loved her, and begged her to marry him; she in gentle tones thanked him for what he had done, and gladly consented.

"Just then Evening Star approached, and begged them to rest in her beautiful country. Gorgeous palaces awaited them, and a splendid people wanted to be governed, she said. 'And,' she added, 'if you consent, each night I will come and visit you, for I love the Sunset Princess as a sister, and my greatest happiness will be to watch yours.'

"Then the Sunset Princess, who also loved Evening Star, begged Oswald to consent. They lived ever afterward in that charming country on the banks of a great and lovely lake. The waters of the lake were so clear that the pebbles many feet below glistened like fire-opals. There they lived in great happiness; and as the years went by Oswald loved his beautiful wife more, for she was charming to see.

"Each evening, as the sun went down, Oswald and his lovely family (for there were many little children) met on the shores of the lake, and the Princess always wore her bright flower dress. Even now, if you will but watch for their coming, you will see them yourself. First comes the Princess, proud and graceful as on that first evening when Oswald discovered her. Prince Oswald is close beside, and the children troop down in brilliant flower dresses like their mother's. The red sandstone cliffs on the high banks of the lake are the first to catch the glow of the children's garments. Suddenly the dull sandstone reflects a brilliant light, gleaming out like burning fire. The glowing cliffs tinge with magic colors the soft fleecy clouds above, and one by one these colors deepen. Purple, gray, pink, gold, and crimson lights blend together, in glorious confusion. The calm surface of the water reflects the brightly colored heavens, and gradually the whole western world is aflame.

"Thus each evening, in this glorious field of color, Oswald and his family watch the sky, and await the nightly visit of the splendid Evening Star."

CHAPTER X

HOW THE MOON PRINCESS WAS TAKEN CAPTIVE BY THE BLACK DWARF

As the guide finished his story of the Sunset Princess, Ethelda noticed they had passed through the forest, and it was with a little thrill of terror she saw the black dwarf and his companions a short distance ahead.

After thanking their kind messenger for his guidance and the delightful stories he had told them, Prince Dorion and his party joined the dwarf. He seemed more hideous than ever, but his manner was perfectly respectful as he greeted his guests, and he hardly looked at the Princess. Two days of travel followed,—days during which new beauties of the earth were revealed; and because of her interest in these beauties the lovely Moon Princess almost forgot her sad forebodings. She did not see the black dwarf during that time, and the horror of his presence almost passed. He kept out of her sight, and remaining in front with his imps, led the way.

Gold and silver had been scattered as they travelled, and for each piece that fell there formed later a splendid mine. The precious metal, melting and filtering through the earth in slender veins, reached finally the heart of the deepest mountains. There it spread and grew, until to-day the earth is full of its treasures in gold and silver mines.

One day, Ethelda, light-hearted and happy, had loitered behind for a moment, to gather some tiny green ferns creeping between the rocks. She was stooping to pluck one, when suddenly she felt herself rudely seized. Looking up, she saw it was the black dwarf who had her within his grasp. She tried to get away, but his grip was like iron on her delicate arm. She could not move, and realizing her utter helplessness, she screamed aloud. Her agonizing call reached her husband, but too late for him to aid her. For the black dwarf stamped violently upon the ground, which opened wide, and with her in his arms he sank into the opening, which immediately closed over them. Then Ethelda fainted.

When she recovered, she found she was in a large vaulted chamber, in a big cave. The light was very poor, but she could see the ugly black dwarf watching her steadily. For a moment she thought she would die of fright, and then she remembered that, as a Moon maiden, she had the power to protect herself from harm. In that instant her courage returned and strengthened her. Softly she repeated the words of the charm she had learned in the nursery of the Moon palace, and had sung at her mother's knee. In a low, musical voice she chanted:—

Rays of the Moon, brilliant and bright,
Protect me by day, protect me by night.
Naught can harm me when in your embrace,
Protect me you must, as child of your race.
Send but the halo seen often about you,
And I promise, sweet mother, I never shall doubt you.

As she sang, a beautiful halo formed gradually about her, such as you sometimes see about the moon, and in the centre of this great shining space Ethelda stood alone.

When she moved, her white and silver dress flashed in long sparkling rays, like the moonlight on the water. The black man covered his eyes to shield them at first from the blinding light, for it was like the sudden flashing of midday into the darkest night, and the cave became very bright. He looked on surprised, not understanding Ethelda's words, and on finding what she had done he was completely astounded. He stepped forward quickly to snatch her from the glowing circle, but found he could not reach her side. Then he became furious and called his imps, who swarmed to his assistance; but when they approached the maiden, a barrier of iron seemed to stand before them. They could not break it down at all, nor could they penetrate the beaming circle. Ethelda was safe from any harm except imprisonment.

The dwarf soon abandoned all thought of reaching her, and in truth he never really meant to harm her, but had stolen her to marry her. So he determined to try kindness to win her love, and though he kept her a prisoner, he was not otherwise unkind. In many ways he tried to please her.

For years he had been fitting up a wonderful cave, hoping some day to induce a lovely maiden to accept and marry him. But he was so ugly and repulsive that all the Earth maidens shunned him. Still he had gone on decorating the cave, determined to steal a wife if necessary.

He had gone to the Earth festival with the intention of finding a wife there, but when his eyes fell on the Princess Ethelda he forgot all the other maidens. He thought her gloriously beautiful, and determined to steal her, although she was already married. Therefore, he made up his mind that the Moon Princess should love him and forget her husband. On that account he tried to be kind. Every morning he sent her a beautiful gift, and then soon after paid her a visit and asked her to marry him. Each day her reply was the same, —that she loved her husband and hated him, but if he would restore her to her husband, and show her her home in the starry skies, she would forgive his stealing her. At these words the dwarf would go into a great rage and leave the room, but every day he would return, hoping she had changed her mind.

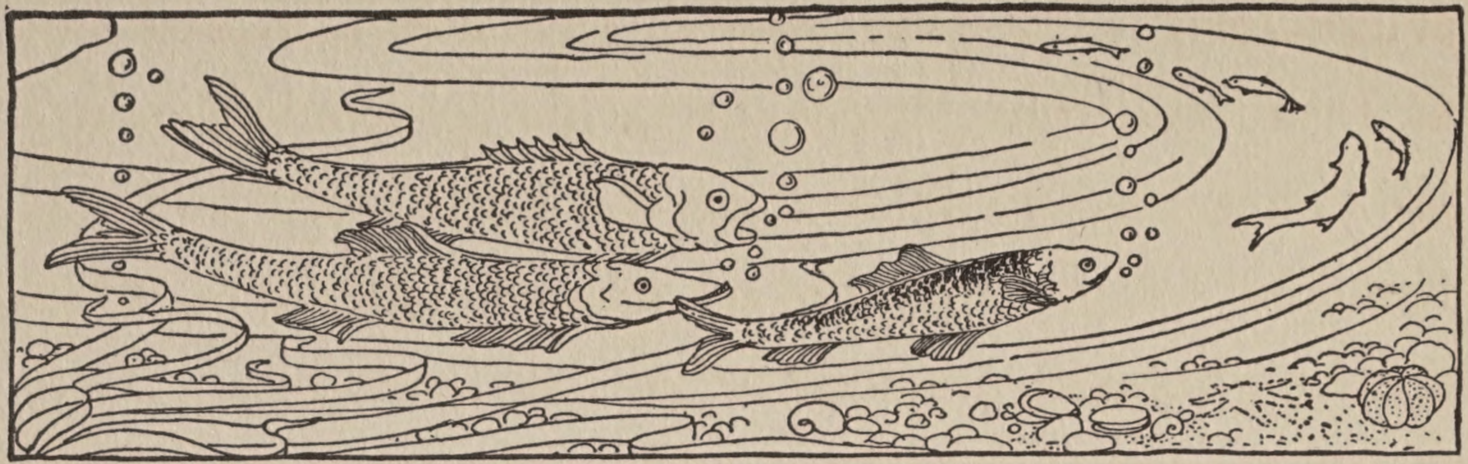
At last he conceived a great idea by which he thought he could win her. Day and night he worked over it, and one morning, when it was completed, he invited her in to see a room he had fitted especially for her to occupy. He thought she would be so pleased at what he had done for her that she could no longer refuse him.

When he opened the door and bade her enter, she was amazed and delighted in spite of herself. Round and beautiful in shape was the room. Great stalactites and stalagmites hung from the ceiling and grew from the floors,—all a mass of shining light, for they were of purest white crystal, and shone like the sun. The room was richly furnished, and every comfort seemed there; but all of this was not what she saw to admire. It was a darker room beyond that absorbed and enchanted her. Her eyes beheld what she thought at first was her own beautiful home again. Quickly she passed into it. Blue as the heavens she had left was the lofty ceiling she gazed into. She stared with fresh wonder at the bejewelled stars, and with beating heart watched their brilliant rays. She expected every moment to see the Moon sail past in silver glory. But the radiant splendor of her mother's Moon palace was absent, and then

Ethelda recognized with a great pang that it was not really the sky she saw at all.

The countless clusters of stars overheard had been gathered only with untold labor. The dwarf had stationed his numerous slaves to watch the heavens all the night, and when a shooting star fell they seized and brought it straight to him. Gradually, therefore, toiling and working in this way, they built the famous Star Chamber in the great black cave for the Moon Princess.

Ethelda's disappointment was very keen when she learned the truth. Still she loved the Star Chamber better than any other spot in her prison, and she visited it often.



CHAPTER XI

HOW THE SUN PRINCE RESCUED THE MOON PRINCESS

IN the meanwhile Prince Dorion, distracted with grief, was trying in every way to dig down deep enough to rescue his beloved bride. But the stones would not yield. He had seen his darling disappear in the hands of the hideous black dwarf, and he often came to that place to mourn. Night after night he visited it, hoping a miracle would restore Ethelda to him there. But all day he searched the world for her.

The Earth, mortified by this outrage to her hospitality, tried to help him. Her granddaughters, the mermaids, had sought information from every part of the globe, but as yet without success. The Moon Princess had disappeared from the face of the Earth completely. The year passed, and sorrowful and sick at heart the Sun Prince bade his companions adieu. He determined to abide upon the Earth until he found Ethelda. What was his amazement, therefore, when the knights and maidens refused to leave him. They would wait with him, they said. The loss of his bride had bound them more closely together. The Sun's rays looked down appealingly and the Moon ladder glittered temptingly, but they bravely turned their eyes away. They built a beautiful city near the Ocean, where they could see the Moon ladder more plainly, but they had lost the right to climb its shining steps, for the twelve months had expired.

Prince Dorion searched every day for his bride. He consulted a wise witch living alone in a deep forest, but she shook her head sadly, and always replied in these curious words:—

"Search as you please,
  But not among trees
Shall the fair Princess be found.
  Go from the water
  To the Moon's daughter;
There lies she in prison bound!"

Never a word more would she utter, and the poor Prince would puzzle himself about how he could reach the Princess. But he continued his search. He would often go to the spot where his beloved had disappeared. A stately tree, as slender as the Princess, had sprung up there. Its waving green branches swayed gently, and stretched out with delicate, tender leaves. Its trunk wore the white and silver dress of the Moon maiden, and stood like a ghost to mark the place.

The Earth people ever after called it the Silver Birch. At its foot a beautiful little spring had bubbled up, and its crystal-clear waters had formed a tiny stream that gurgled over the rocks, seeking to reach the sea. In its shining depths he sometimes saw the Moon's ladder, and he fancied the clear blue eyes of Ethelda looked out wistfully at him. But it was only the blue patches of sky overhead.

One night, sad and depressed, he sat beside the Ocean. The great throbbing sea seemed to soothe him a little. While he sat there thinking of Ethelda, and almost despairing, a mermaid floated shoreward. Resting her beautiful arms on the white gleaming sand, she spoke to him.

"O, Prince of the Sun," she began, "I have news for you — news of your lost bride."

"News of my beloved Ethelda?" cried the Prince, joyously.

"Yes," answered the mermaid, "your Ethelda is safe and unharmed. I have seen her."

"You have seen her?" cried the Prince. "O favored mermaid, take me to her at once."

"Mighty Prince," replied she, "I have come to show you the way. Do you remember the bubbling stream you have often sat beside? It was formed from Ethelda's tears. Those crystal drops arose even through the rocks to comfort you; but deeper down ran the stream, cutting into the Earth until it formed a dark and gloomy river to lead you back to her. I found this stream and followed it — straight from the crystal spring into a dark and gloomy cave. There Ethelda lives and waits for you."

A moment more and Prince Dorion was swimming beside the little mermaid. They swam along the coast until a dark line showed them where the river joined the ocean. And after many a turn and twist in the black river, they reached Ethelda's cave.

The Moon Princess sat within the vaulted Star Chamber alone. What a radiant creature she was! Her silver halo surrounded her, and she was chanting in a musical voice the pretty words which had caused it to form. The Sun Prince's eyes dwelt lovingly upon her, but he was amazed to see overhead the stars shining in the clear blue vault of heaven.

"Ethelda," he cried softly; and his heart leaped with love at the sight of his bride, and bounding forward he reached her side. In another moment she lay in his arms, sobbing and laughing for joy.

"Beloved, you are unhurt?" he questioned anxiously.

"Yes," she answered, growing calmer. "I am unharmed; and in a way he was not unkind. But he wished me to marry him, and so kept me in this gloomy cave, hoping I would consent.

"See, beloved, even the stars above us he stole to comfort me and win my love. Every shooting star that fell from the heavens was brought here and placed in that high ceiling. They shine so brightly there that the blackness of the ceiling seems almost blue, and sometimes I almost believe I am gazing into the skies. But, beloved, nothing comforted me in your absence. I have sat weeping here, forming this river of tears to bring you to me."

Prince Dorion pressed her tenderly to his breast at these words, and whispered: "Dry your tears now, sweetheart, you will not need them longer, for I shall take you for ever away from this hideous prison."

Silently he carried her to the mermaid's side, and softly they slipped away.

But before Ethelda left, feeling herself safe again within her husband's arms, she slipped out of the Moon's halo and left it in the famous Star Chamber of the black cave. There it stays for every one to see, lighting the room with its silver rays in company with the glorious stars which the black dwarf stole and placed there.

Back again into the golden sunshine Ethelda came, and once more the beautiful Moon shone down caressingly upon her. Freed from the black dwarf's spell, and with her loved companions, she soon recovered from her long imprisonment, and was lovelier and more joyous than ever. She had almost forgotten those trying days and the black dwarf's cruelty, but the Earth Queen had not.

Her Majesty summoned the dwarf and all his wicked followers to court for trial, and he did not dare to disobey her summons. Ethelda and the Sun Prince were invited to hear his sentence; and an awful punishment it was that was put upon him. He was condemned to live always in the dark cave where he had kept Ethelda prisoner. With his followers he would never again be allowed to see the Sun or the Moon; never again could he behold the face of the Earth.

The Moon Princess shuddered as she heard the dreadful sentence, for to her darkness was the worst of punishments. She turned to the Earth Queen and said impulsively: "Oh, your Majesty, be not so cruel! Sentence them to anything rather than eternal darkness."

So the Earth Queen, listening to the tender pleadings of the gentle Moon maiden, relented; but still the dwarf's crime must not be dealt with lightly. She consented, however, to allow the culprits to see the Sun and the Moon, but they were destined to become the slaves of the mermaids, and live always in the water. Then, fearing they might forget they were put into the water to expiate their crime (for the mermaids were kind-hearted and good), she changed them into fishes, and marked every one with the shining colors of the Sun and Moon. Even now, if you notice carefully the pretty fish swimming in the sparkling water, you will see the fiery red color of the sun blending with the delicate silver tints of the moon. These markings of gold and silver they must carry for ever as evidence of their slavery, and in punishment of their wicked deed. In other respects they are not unhappy.

Ethelda and the Sun Prince dwelt always after upon the Earth, but they loved it, as you know. The Moon Mother, looking down and seeing their joy, and how contented they were, gradually became reconciled to their remaining. As a proof of her forgiveness and friendliness to them and their decendants, she has left the Moon ladder down. She has never taken it away since the night the bridal party walked down its shimmering silver stairs. Every night, between the mystic hours of dusk and the rosy dawn, somewhere in the heavens, that splendid white palace is shining, and its bright ladder is stretching down in a flood of glory.

Since then, maybe (who knows?) other Moon maidens have walked down those jewelled steps to a honeymoon on the Earth.

THE END.

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